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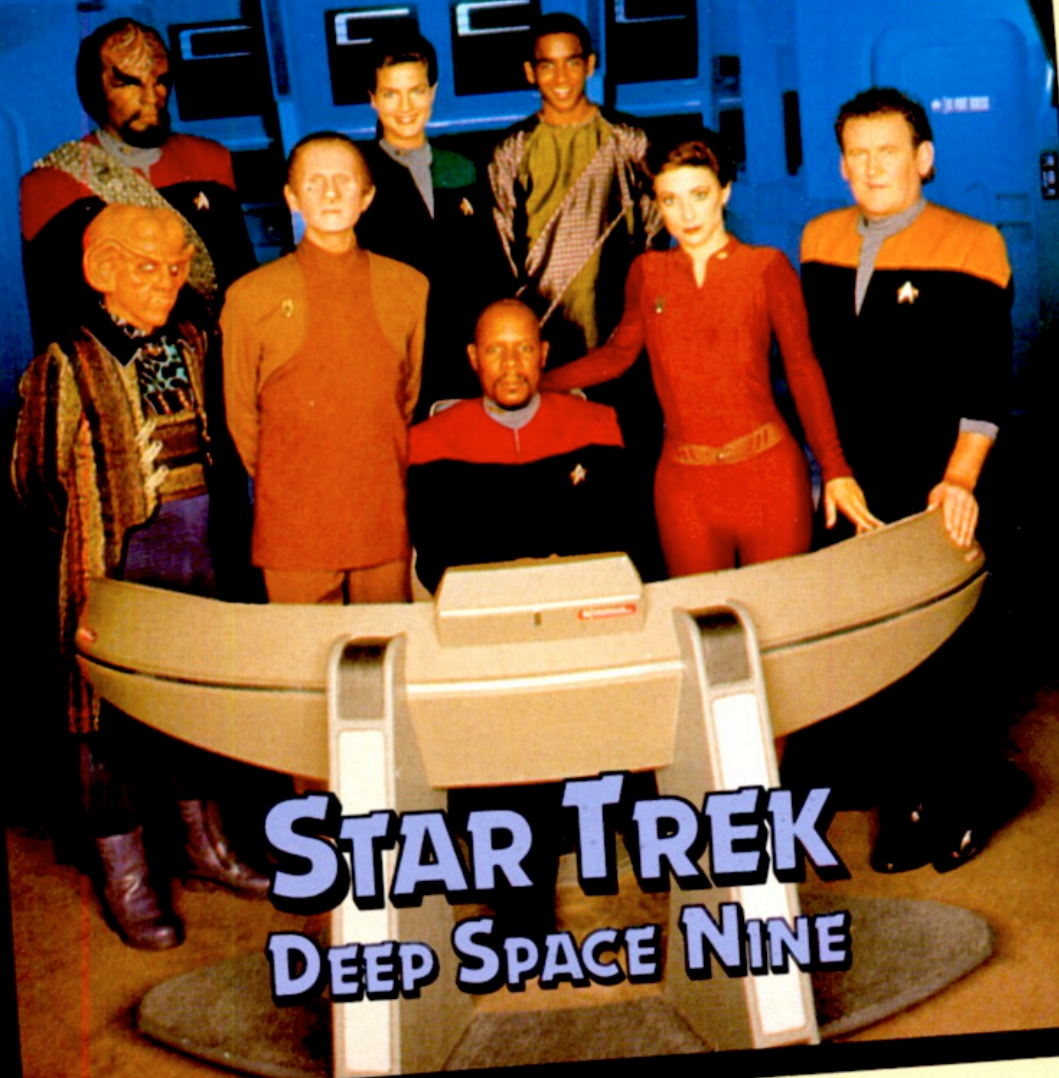
CHRIS CARTER
VINCE GILLIGAN
WILLIAM B. DAVIS
THE LONE GUNMEN
GENE RODDENBERRY'S
"ANDROMEDA"
PHILIP K. DICK'S
IMPOSTOR

Volume 32
Number 3



D. Voigt

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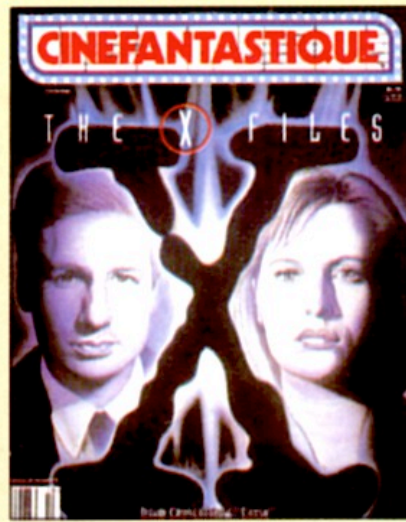
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"The Magazine with a Sense of Wonder"

OCTOBER 2000

Welcome to our annual report on all things X-FILES. New York correspondent Dan Persons interviews series creator Chris Carter, writer/producer Vince Gilligan, Cigarette Smoking Man William B. Davis, and provides an intriguing inside view of the making of the show's seventh season. Files fanatic Paula Vitaris also provides her perceptive episode guide commentary to the season, Thomas Doherty critiques the show's staying power, and Persons takes a peek at THE LONE GUNMEN as a potential mid-season entry next year.

Now that David Duchovny's Mulder has joined Richard Dreyfuss in CLOSE ENCOUNTERS-land, Gillian Anderson as Scully looms larger than ever on the cover and on the series as it enters its eighth season. Duchovny will be back, mostly at the start of the season, filming 11 of 20 episodes planned for the 2000-2001 season. Helping Anderson carry the load will be TERMINATOR 2's Robert Patrick, introduced in the season opener as Scully's new partner, assigned to help her track down the abducted Mulder. Patrick gets third billing, behind Duchovny and Anderson, and will appear in all twenty episodes. In Fox's announcement of the casting, series creator Chris Carter noted that Patrick's character will be the polar-opposite of Mulder—hey, we thought that was Scully! Though no one, including Carter, is signed for a season beyond the next, it's hinted that Patrick could give new impetus to continue the TV installments as Anderson and Duchovny retire to carry-on the franchise strictly as a movie series.

Personally, I would have preferred to see Nicholas Lea as Krycek groomed to fill Duchovny's shoes, with Anderson given the chance to carry the show solo for awhile. Reforming Krycek would have given the character some interesting shadings, and Lea can be an electric performer. Nevertheless, Patrick, relentless killer cyborg and alien teacher of THE FACULTY has some of the same shadings, and is an intriguing choice. One thing's for sure, after season seven the series certainly has plenty of room for improvement. *Frederick S. Clarke*



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Publisher & Editor: Frederick S. Clarke. **Bureaus:** New York/ Dan Persons, Dan Scapperotti. Los Angeles/ Mitch Persons, Douglas Eby. London/ Alan Jones.

Contributors: Thomas Doherty, Denise Dumars, Dennis Fischer, David Hines, Pat Legare, Paula Vitaris, Chuck Wagner, Paul Wardle.

Editorial Operations Manager: Lisa Tomczak-Walkington. **Editorial Production:** Lisa Coduto.

Publisher's Assistant/Circulation: Faith Redding. **Business Manager:** Celeste Casey Clarke.

PHOTO CREDITS: ©2000 Columbia (Michael Gibson 44, 45, 46, 47T); ©1999 Fox (Rob Brown 21T, 31T, 34T, 33T; Nicola Goode 18T, 20L, 22L; Michael Grecco 19; Larry Watson 18BL, 20T, 22R, 25T, 29BR, 32, 34BR, 35, 37T, 37BR); ©2000 Fox (27); Kim Gottlieb (6B); ©John Paul Kieffer (10, 11, 12, 14, 15); ©Miramax (Kimberly Wright 6T, 7, 8B, 9); ©2000 New Line (Jasin Boland 49TL; L. Sebastian 52-53); Albert L. Ortega (36R); ©2000 20th Century-Fox (Attila Dory 62); Stephen Vaughan (56, 59); ©1998 Warner Bros (Katrina Cabrera 30T). **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:** Vincent A. Guastini, Larry Tetewsky. **COVER:** David Voigt.

CINEFANTASTIQUE (ISSN 0145-6032) is published bi-monthly at 7240 W. Roosevelt Rd., Forest Park, IL 60130. (708) 366-5566. www.cfq.com / mail@cfq.com Second class postage paid at Forest Park, IL 60130 & additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to CINEFANTASTIQUE, P.O. Box 270, Oak Park, IL 60303.

Subscriptions: 6 issues \$26, 12 Issues \$48, 18 issues \$69. (Foreign & Canada: 6 issues \$34, 12 issues \$55,

18 Issues \$80.) Single copies: \$8. **Retail Distribution:** In the U.S. by Eastern News Distributors, 250 W. 55th St., New York, NY 10019. (800) 221-3148.

Submissions of artwork and articles are encouraged, but must be accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

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GENE RODDENBERRY

STAR TREK's Robert Wolfe on crafting a new

By David Z.C. Hines

"Hold on," said Robert Wolfe. "Trance just walked into my office. She's all purple. I'm checking her purpleness."

Wolfe, on the phone from the GENE RODDENBERRY'S ANDROMEDA stages in Vancouver, isn't hallucinating—though he's probably close to it by now. A week before the May 8th start of production for the series starring Kevin Sorbo, he's cramming frantically on the last-minute details that bother every genre show-runner, such as making sure that supporting character Trance Gemini, played by Laura Bertram, is just the right shade of purple and has a properly convincing tail. "We really want the tail," said Wolfe, "but we only want to do it if we can do it right." Though he's tired, and sounds it, on another level he's having the time of his life.

"The thing that every writer will tell you," he said, "is that they always want to be the head writer on the show. Really communicate their vision and tell stories the way that they see them in their heads."

ANDROMEDA, the second series credited as being posthumously created by the late Gene Roddenberry, was developed by STAR TREK: DEEP SPACE NINE veteran Wolfe, from material provided by Majel Barret-Roddenberry, the widow of the STAR TREK creator. "Majel provided a huge amount of his personal writings on a million different things," Wolfe explained, "and in them were a lot of character ideas and story ideas that I pulled together, and he'd done a short treatment, as well, on what he envisioned would be the next way to go with a starship-based show." Wolfe added his own ideas to the mix; he (and Tribune) graciously declined to explain how the contributions broke down.

The result, premiering in October, 2000, stars Kevin Sorbo as Dylan Hunt, captain of the sentient starship Andromeda Ascendant (personified by Lexa Doig), who is trapped very near a black hole in the aftermath of a critical battle for the future of the Systems Commonwealth, a benevolent intergalactic civilization. When Hunt and his ship are retrieved, 300 years have passed in the

outside universe and the Commonwealth has fallen. Hunt and Andromeda, accompanied by the salvage team who rescued him from the black hole—Beka Valentine (Lisa Ryder), Tyr Anasazi (Keith Hamilton Cobb), Rev Bem (Brent Stait), Seamus Harper (Gordon Michael Woolvett), and Trance Gemini (Laura Bertram)—set out on a quest to restore the Commonwealth and the golden age it represents.

"He's got a real tragic element to him," said ANDROMEDA writer Ashley Miller, of Dylan Hunt. "I mean, think about it. Everybody he knew and loved is 300 years dead. And without going into detail, a lot of that came about in a way that was very personal and very hard for him. He very well could be a Don Quixote: he's trying to piece together this commonwealth that may never come back together, but yet he tries. Dylan is not a Pollyanna. He's not going around saying, 'Let's hold hands'—hands across the universe, singing 'Kumbaya,' 'Michael, Row the Boat Ashore,' all that crap. This is a guy who believes that paradise can be built because he's seen it with his own eyes."

Hunt's quest is complicated, Wolfe said, by the fact that, "in various ways, each of [the supporting characters] is a product of the Dark Age that he finds himself in."

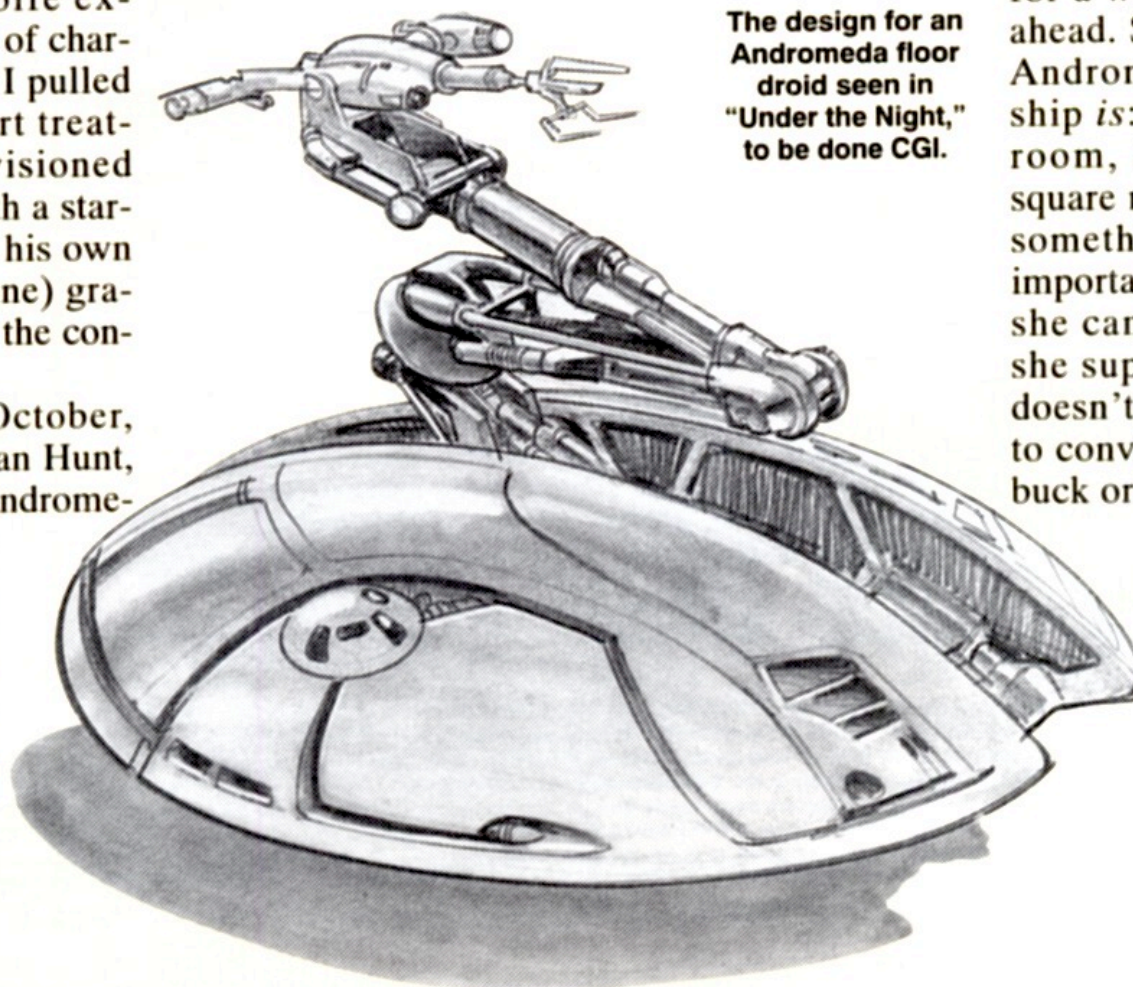
"You create people for that situation to give you lots of material for drama and exciting stories," Wolfe said. "That's what suggests the characters, and then you play it

from there to give lots of voices to comment on or react to any situation. So we have one character who's very spiritual, we have one character who's very pragmatic, and they get into disagreements. We have one character who's very monetarily driven, we have one character who's motivated by excitement and adventure—and that gives us a spectrum of responses and emotional things to touch on and use. If you're gonna do a story about a piece of situational material, to me there's no point in doing it if the characters aren't emotionally involved. Because if the characters aren't emotionally involved, the audience won't be emotionally involved."

The monetarily-driven character on the show is Beka Valentine (Lisa Ryder), who becomes Dylan's executive officer. "To shorthand her," said ANDROMEDA writer Ethlie Ann Vare, late of EARTH: FINAL CONFLICT, "she is Han Solo with boobs. She is the scrappy head of the salvage vessel that pulls the Andromeda out of the black hole. She is a strong, grown-up, gutsy, feisty lady, captain of her own ship, an absolute equal to Dylan, and probably—he's very wily, so I don't want to say more wily, but she is perhaps more devious."

Beka was born on her salvage vessel, the Eureka Maru, and inherited it from her father. Because she has always had to struggle for a living in the bleak post-Commonwealth era, she is always looking for a way to come out just a bit more ahead. She is less concerned with what Andromeda represents than what the ship is: a substantial asset that offers room, comfort, security, and three square meals a day. The chance to serve something greater than herself is less important to Beka than the opportunities she can make along the way. Though she supports Dylan in his efforts, she doesn't conceal the fact that she'd like to convince him to let the crew make a buck or two.

Tyr Anasazi, played by Keith Hamilton Cobb, is much more ruthlessly pragmatic. Tyr is a Nietzschean, one of a genetically-engineered offshoot of humanity dedicated to social Darwinism, who believe that races are strengthened only through conflict. Tyr is an odd person to



The design for an Andromeda floor droid seen in "Under the Night," to be done CGI.

TYR'S "ANDROMEDA"

show from notes left by the late Trek creator

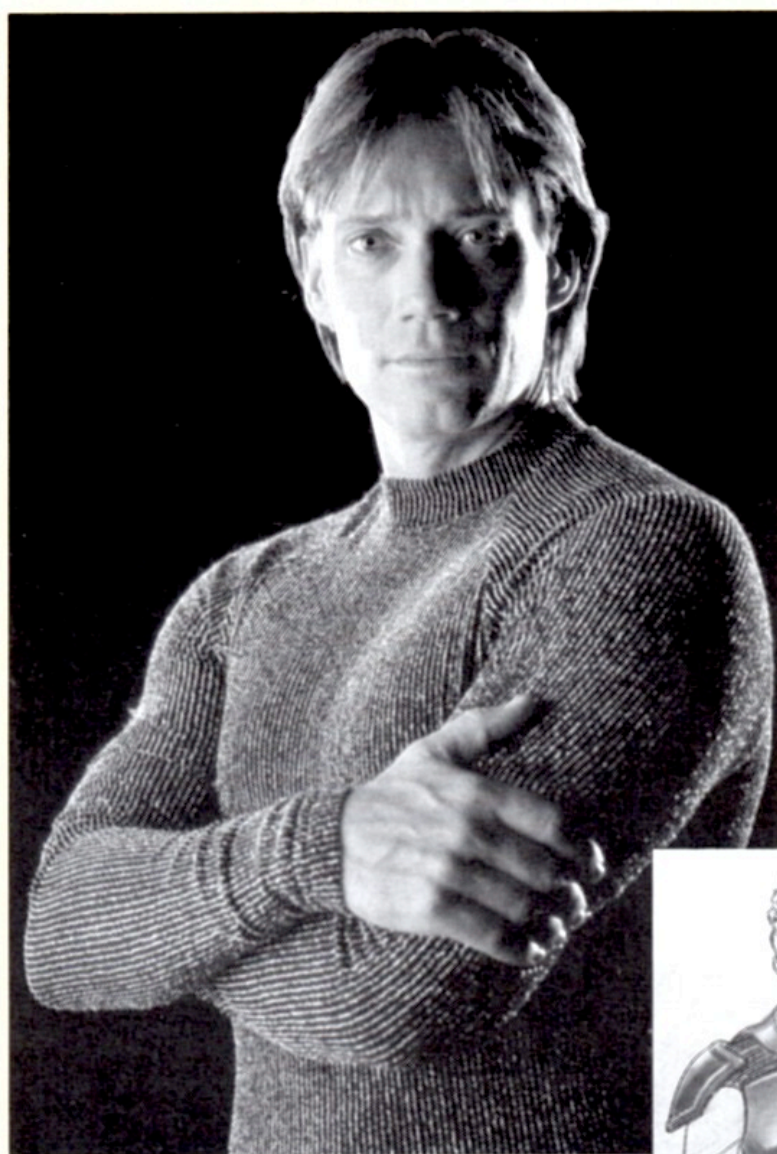
find aboard a ship trying to restore a benevolent, peaceful government—and Tyr is far from an atypical Nietzschean, according to writing staff members Joe Reinkemeyer and Matt Kiene, whose credits include *BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER* and *SPACE: ABOVE AND BEYOND*.

"I love Tyr," said Reinkemeyer. "The whole concept of Nietzscheans that Robert came up with. It's just nice when there can be a historical, cultural, or intellectual underpinning to characters." Kiene agreed. "Tyr's probably one of the most honest characters on television," he said, "because at least he's straightforward about operating in his own self-interest." Tyr's mercilessness and pragmatism lead him into conflict with Dylan and the other characters, including the show's most spiritually-oriented character, Rev Bem (Brent Stait), a scientist, linguist, and sociologist who happens to be a monk.

"Dylan is a military guy," said Ashley Miller. "It's one type of character that Hollywood always gets wrong. The other type is the religious guy. It's easy to default to the New Age, crystal-waving weenie, and Rev Bem is anything but that. Rev Bem is somebody who is educated, who has questions, who is who he is because he has questions, not because he has answers that he doles out in fortune cookies."

Rev Bem—a nickname; the character's real name, the series bible notes, is "an unpronounceable ultrasonic screech,"—is a Magog, a carnivorous race, eating only freshly-killed meat, who not only have no compunctions against preying on sentients but rely on them to reproduce. Magogs paralyze beings and lay eggs in their bodies; when the young hatch, the still-conscious sentient provides a first meal. Rev Bem fights his naturally savage inclinations by relying on the tenets of his religion, Wayism, an amalgam of several human religions, under which he has taken vows of pacifism and celibacy. "When you have a character with that intense an internal conflict," said Joe Reinkemeyer, "that makes for great writing."

"Ostensibly," said Ashley Miller of Rev Bem, "he is one of the most dangerous, brutal killing machines in the universe, and he is constantly at war with his instincts. I



Kevin Sorbo stars as Dylan Hunt, commander of the sentient starship of the title. Inset: Costume design. The Tribune syndicated TV series premieres in October.



mean, this is a guy who looks out at the crew, and if he was really honest with himself and everybody else, he would tell you that what he sees is not his friends, but breakfast."

"And that makes him cool, too," added Miller's writing partner Zack Stentz, "because his religion is not an abstract force, but it is *literally* the thing that keeps him from killing or impregnating all of his crewmates."

Seamus Harper, played by Gordon Michael Woolvett, is positively normal by comparison. "Harper is a smart-ass," said Matt Kiene, "and he's a lot of fun to write for." Zack Stentz concurred. "Sometimes I think of Harper as the unholy offspring of Xander from *BUFFY* and the Bill Paxton character from *ALIENS*," he said. Bizarre cross-universe slash aside, Harper, Wolfe noted, is "the audience surrogate for the show," who provides an everyman perspective. "He'll come to represent the kind of people Dylan needs to convert to his cause," Wolfe noted, "the average Joe

who's given hope for the future."

Harper probably has the bleakest life experience of any of the crew, having been born and grown up on the devastated post-Commonwealth Earth. Between the Magog and the Nietzscheans, he's lucky to have reached adulthood. On the beaten, crowded Eureka Maru, Harper serves as Beka's engineer. When he encounters the Andromeda, he falls in love—in more ways than one.

"Basically," said Wolfe, "the ship is fully sentient. It's a person. It has a personality. It has everything a person has. [And it has] different robotic bodies it can use to interact with people." That interaction can be anything from unnoticed to intimidating: in addition to her humanoid bodies, Andromeda has a

complement of robots ranging from huge battledroids to nearly invisible gnat-sized 'bots."

"The Andromeda androids that we're building," Wolfe says, "these are the ones that are actually human sized. They're sort of 'Marias' from *METROPOLIS*—not *really*, but sort of in that family.

The gnat-sized ones and the battle-sized ones—the battledroid sized ones will all be CG, they won't actually physically exist." Alexa Doig serves as the voice and physical and holographic representations of the ship.

The regular cast is rounded out by Trance Gemini, played by Laura Bertram. An alien of unknown origin—nobody on Andromeda recognizes her species, and she isn't telling—Trance serves as the ship's botanist, xeno-biologist, and medic when she's needed in that capacity. Her background is sparsely drawn, but Wolfe hints broadly that there's a lot more to her than she, and he, are telling. Despite the comparative lack of background relative to her shipmates, Ethlie Ann Vare lists Trance as one of her favorite characters to write. And yes, she's purple and has a tail (Trance, not Vare). "We have a variety of tails, which do a variety of different things," Wolfe said. "Including one that's, obviously, all CG. But a lot of it we think we can do practically, so we're very excited about that." □

PHILIP K. DICK'S IMPOSTOR

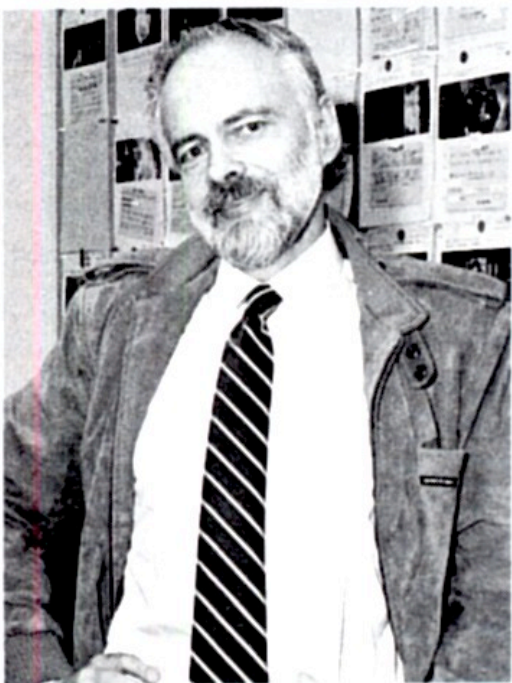
Scriptwriter David Twohy on adapting one of the giants of SF for the big screen.

By Denise Dumars

"I won't take just any project, no matter how much money they offer me, if I don't think I can do some good," said screenwriter/director David Twohy of his work on IMPOSTOR. The last of four writers to work on the film, Twohy was intrigued enough by the story to take on the script and adapt it in a way that he feels is "more focused on story and brings the film more into thriller mode." The adaptation of a story by the late, great science fiction author Philip K. Dick opens nationwide October 6, from Miramax.

The accomplished Twohy, most recently known for writing and directing the science fiction action thriller PITCH BLACK, is perhaps best known as a screenwriter for his work on THE FUGITIVE. "Richard Kimball [the fugitive] was a

The late Philip K. Dick, whose fiction has resulted in films such as TOTAL RECALL and BLADERUNNER.



Gary Sinise as Spence Olham, suspected to be an Alpha Centauri "Imposter," on the run in the Zone with Mekhi Phifer as Cale, an underground trader.

character that couldn't doubt for a moment. He knew he was innocent, and he had to prove it. When I was brought in to work on the character of Spence in IMPOSTOR, I had a very different sort of fugitive to deal with. Because he doubts; how delicious, I thought, if Spence goes within himself to this dark and ugly place where he doubts his own humanity."

Spence Olham is played in this film by Gary Sinise, on the run because he is thought to be an alien simulacra from Alpha Centauri. Noted Sinise, "My character is kind of like J. Robert Oppenheimer in his intelligence and his knowledge, and he also has a very personal investment in the creation of a weapon that can annihilate an entire race—the Centauri race. You can't really call them human beings—they're another

life form."

Sinise stars in the film with Madeleine Stowe and Tim Guinne. "Aside from the action, I also liked the emotional love story between my character, Spence Olham and his wife, played by Madeleine Stowe," said Sinise. "The two of us have a very tender relationship that is placed in jeopardy because of what happens to me—my abduction. So the movie turns from a kind of sweet story into a very tense sci-fi thriller. It's fun."

Of course, Twohy doesn't know how much of his version of the script will end up in the finished film. "I was hired to do a shooting script from a script already written, and that's hard. Plus there was a pretty good little 30-minute film already made, and we had to work around that footage. The hardest

thing was having to perform triage on the script. Somebody's favorite scenes had to get cut, but we had to make the characters' motivations better, make the characters move and act on them."

It was also the first time Twohy had worked with director Gary Fleder, and this was right after coming off a film where he had directorial control. "I won't say that Gary and I didn't lock horns a couple of times," he admitted. "but we ended up working well with each other." Working with existing footage couldn't have been easy. "My intention was to use as much as possible of the film that already existed. After all, we had these great actors, Gary Sinise and Madeleine Stowe. We needed to create additional material to flesh the short film out to feature length. So I had to adapt what had come before. I felt I had to rail a bit about the box I'd been put in; or, to use another metaphor, I was trying to thread three strings into one needle, all at the same time."

But Twohy feels the script was worth it; he also read the short story and feels in touch with Philip K. Dick's original vision. "I'm assuming he was writing this as a metaphor for the Cold War era, the McCarthy era and all that. I think it's still valid today to remind the audience that paranoia can hit a society at any time." Twohy sounds interested in doing more work based on the science fiction novelist's works, which of-



Madeleine Stowe as Maya, Olham's wife, a doctor and hospital administrator who comes to suspect that her husband may be a deadly alien simulacra.

ten deal with issues of identity, reality, and paranoia.

"Various incarnations of the script for IMPOSTOR had broadened the characters. It's very much character-driven science fiction. I was brought in to get the story focused and to bring it more on-message. We had great characters but not enough drive. So it was a challenge to me to come in and bring those essential elements to the plot."

Noted Madeleine Stowe of the script, "IMPOSTOR delves into the personal lives of characters as opposed to the characters being objects in a great big set piece. And while this film has huge sets and fabulous production design, you feel it's much more about the people involved. My character, Maya, is a doctor and an administrator at a hospital. She and her husband have a very intimate, very physical relationship. You don't see that very often in futuristic films—that touching of flesh. When she hears that Spence may be a cyborg, that he might be carrying a bomb that's going to destroy us all, it's impossible to believe. But she knows it's within the realm of technical possibility, so she's pretty conflicted."

Stowe and Sinise's co-star in IMPOSTOR, Tim Guinne, is a familiar figure in science fiction, fantasy, and horror films.

In 1997 he spent his time traveling back and forth between two vampire film shoots, BLADE and JOHN CARPENTER'S VAMPIRES. Now, after a stint on the brief 1999 television series STRANGE WORLD, Guinne has a supporting role in IMPOSTOR.

"He's a little slimy," he said of his character, Dr. Carone, who works in the film at the hospital with Maya (Madeleine Stowe). "The hospital in the film is like an army hospital: overcrowded, understaffed, underfunded," he explains. "My character doesn't want to accept so many patients, but Maya doesn't want to turn anyone away. It's like any big city ER in today's world."

In explaining Dr. Carone's "sliminess," Guinne said, "He's

Tim Guinne co-stars as Dr. Carone, with Stowe. Twohy, screenwriter of THE FUGITIVE, tailored the script to an earlier draft and thirty minutes of footage.



"[IMPOSTOR] makes you think," said Guinne. "So much of Hollywood thinks you have to spell everything out for the viewer. We're not letting any secrets get out."

the kind of guy who makes sexually harassing statements at work. He says it's a joke, but you know he's really serious. My character is interested in Maya sexually, obviously," noted Guinne. "He's her chief doctor, and at first he's more or less a good guy, but then switches sides. The story of IMPOSTOR is interesting because you don't know how it will end. It really makes you think. So much of Hollywood thinks that you have to spell everything out for the viewer. We're not letting any secrets get out. It keeps you guessing."

It was Guinne's first time working with director Gary Fleder. "He really had his plate overflowing," said Guinne. "This is a very intensely thematic film, as well as a very visual one. But he was very nice and helpful, and I tried to stay out of his way as much as possible. He had an excellent AD."

Guinne can't say enough good things about production designer Nelson Coates and his work. "His designs were wonderful. They are very astute. Fans in SF are very sharp; that has to be one of the dangers in SF. We didn't want to be derivative, and Nelson did a really cool job."

Guinne spoke of the hospital sets in particular, where most of

his scenes were filmed. "The angles on those sets are meant to set you off-kilter. I felt I was leaning to one side after awhile; I felt off-balance. The overall effect is cold and oppressive, which is what they were going for. The hospital ends up looking utilitarian, and the medical care is almost all done mechanically. This looks like reality," he said. "After all, if we're going to tell a story, if we can find the thing that grounds it to reality, then we've succeeded."

Guinne may be returning to vampire work in the sequel to JOHN CARPENTER'S VAMPIRES. "That film made a ton of money," he said. "Since my character is one of the few that survives, I'll be reprising him in the sequel. It will be shot in Mexico, but this time John Carpenter is not going to direct. And the storyline will be a lot different from the first film."

Guinne would also like to see the return of the short-lived SF series STRANGE WORLD. "Howard Gordon of the X-FILES made the series. We shot 13 episodes. But ABC didn't give it a chance to find its audience. It was a really dark story, and I'm very proud of that show. Perhaps someone else will pick it up and air the rest of the episodes."

Twohy boiled down his decision to work on the script for IMPOSTOR to three basic reasons: "I had time in my schedule, I believed in the piece, and I liked the original short film very much."

He talks about the plot points he wanted to bring out in the script. "Spence must have drive; he must be driven over and above everything else. He must get to that hospital in order to obtain the test that will prove he is human. Along the way, he must travel through the Zone. Originally this is an obstacle for him, but it then becomes an asset. I really like the character of Spence and how he

IMPOSTOR

DESIGNING DICK

Prod. designer Nelson Coates and fx. coord. Joe Grossberg on the look of SF.

By Denise Dumars

didn't know if he was working for the good guys or the bad guys, and ultimately how he even doubts his own humanity. Those aspects of the character made me think that I could do some good for the script."

Twohy learned about Philip K. Dick's work from his experience with IMPOSTOR. "I read Asimov, Clarke, and Heinlein as a kid, but somehow Philip K. Dick was below my radar. Now I want to know more about him, and see if there are other properties of his out there that could be adapted for the screen." In related work in the genre, Twohy mentions speaking with speculative fiction writer Harlan Ellison about the possibility of adapting some of his work for film.

Twohy also writes outside the genre, though he's best known for his science fiction thrillers. "I've written love stories and touching dramatic pieces that I think are some of my best work. But people think of me in a science fiction vein. And maybe that's OK. Maybe science fiction films are coming into their own right about now. They're becoming more character-driven, which is a good thing."

Twohy has a few last words on IMPOSTOR. "Miramax wanted a thriller. I hope I brought that to the film. If I helped to distinguish this piece in some way, then I'll be satisfied." □

Sinise and Phifer traverse the Zone, ruined Earth devastated by the Alpha Centauris, filmed at Sepulveda Dam.



"We never see the aliens," noted special effects coordinator Joe Grossberg of the Centauris in IMPOSTOR. "After all, this is not about aliens, but identity, and their language has not even been fully decoded, nor their motives uncovered. But a translator intercepts a message from the Centauris that seems to indicate that a simulacra has been sent to Earth, with an implanted bomb. Spence Olham comes under suspicion from the ESA, an organization which is both necessary and sinister. They're doing the job of whatever they think, in wartime, is best."

That's the set-up for IMPOSTOR: "Spence is a scientist who has risen to the top of his profession," said Grossberg. "He's in charge of The Project, which is this super-weapon that so many resources are going toward. This is controversial between the haves and the have-nots in the film, since because of The Project, other areas of society are being neglected. There is an epidemic of a fictional disease, for example, that is going unchecked."

Some of the film's gorier moments come from medical procedures. "When he's on the run, Spence has his simcodes removed," Grossberg said. "We used special makeup effects to show the operation. Another area in which we used special effects was to create what happens to Spence when he is drugged with a kind of truth serum by Hathaway [D'Onofrio] and has hallucinations.



Effects coordinator Joe Grossberg, lighting effects for Full Moon's MAGIC ISLAND in 1966, realizing the look of Philip K. Dick.

Everyone he sees looks like Hathaway. Todd Masters did the special makeup effects."

Production designer Nelson Coates laughed gleefully about the chair he designed wherein another impostor is vivisected and found to be carrying a bomb. "Of course, the film has to be dark. The room where Spence is being interrogated is like a JPL lab, so that if the bomb he's supposedly carrying does go off, the city is protected."

The characters do doubt themselves, added Coates. "Sinise, who is so vehement that he's himself, even he questions himself. And D'Onofrio doubts himself too, as to whether he's really identified the right guy as the Impostor. You don't know until the very end whether he is or he isn't."

The horrors of war are not shown in the typical sci-fi con-

text of space cruisers on fire, but rather in the terrible war wounds of soldiers being cared for in the hospital where Maya (Madeleine Stowe) is an administrator. The hospital is clinical to the extreme, with nurses never coming into direct contact with the wounded, and hospital beds with smart chips taking patients' vital signs and administering treatment: another arena where Grossberg's work was required. "Spence has to get back to the hospital to have this futuristic PET scan in order to prove he's human. He has about 40% of this 3-D scan done when all hell breaks loose."

Much of the futuristic effects have to do with scanning devices, both medical and forensic. "There are super high-tech scans that are used in spy technology in the film. For example, there are hand-held monitors for devices that, like super magnetic resonance imaging machines, scan whole buildings looking for Spence. The scans used on Spence are also integral to the story, as they are looking for an implanted bomb that is organic, and could possibly even be overlooked. Then there's the constant danger that something will set the bomb off. Hathaway knows nothing about how the bomb operates or how it could detonate."

Though the film is set 75 years from now, its look is at times familiar to science fiction fans. "The classic range of visual effects in the film goes back to METROPOLIS," said Grossberg. "We had 20 matte paintings done by ILM to establish wide shots. They extend loca-



Sinise as weapons scientist Olham, squirming on the vivisection chair that will determine if he is a deadly organic bomb planted by the Alpha Centauris.

“We’re careful with the special effects,” said Coates. “We don’t want this to be effects-driven; it’s character driven. After all, a lot of it takes place in Spence’s head.”

tions and establish locations in Central City.”

Everyone on the film was cognizant of author Philip K. Dick’s original message. “I’m amazed at how close the film is to the story,” continued Grossberg. “We wanted to remain true to the original vision.”

Grossberg talked a bit about the film’s theme. “Not everyone in the film is convinced that the Centauris started the war. It is suggested that the ESA are war mongers, and that maybe Earth was the original aggressor. Spence [Sinise] and Maya [Stowe] argue over this point and the way the Earth is conducting the war. There’s a scene where he asks why she’s treating alien casualties at the hospital and she tells him that after all, they’re human, aren’t they? It spreads another seed of doubt about characters’ motives and intent in the film.”

Some of Grossberg’s work dealt with the ruined city called the Zone. “The Zone is where the aliens first struck the Earth. In order to keep them out, electromagnetic domes were constructed. The idea is a new power grid. It’s all ground-based, so there are domes that are overlapping. Everybody lives under a dome.”

For the look of the burned-out Zone, the only place where the Centauri were successful in destroying a location on Earth, the Sepulveda

Dam was used as a backdrop, with special effects in the background. “We combined several location shoots to get the right look for the Zone,” Grossberg said. “We were in Desert Center, behind the Ambassador Hotel, at the giant penny, and the Broadway arcade to establish the exteriors. Some of the people who live in the Zone are criminals, some are political outcasts, others, nonconformists. Cale [Mekhi Phifer], who lives in the Zone, is an enemy of Spence’s at first, but soon becomes a friend.”

But design and special effects are not the sum total of the film’s appeal, by far. On a cold, windy night at the Sepulveda Dam in L.A.’s San Fernando Valley, amidst the smoke from numerous fog machines Mekhi Phifer (Cale) and Spence are

shooting a scene in the Zone on a set that Coates designed. With the Art Deco dam in the background and ruins in the foreground, it’s very much WPA meets the post-apocalypse. Coates explained: “We’re careful with the special effects. We don’t want this to be effects-driven; it’s character driven. After all, a lot of it takes place in Spence’s head, and it’s riveting. He’s so good. And we see the conflict with Maya, she flip flops, is he or isn’t he himself?”

Sinise and Phifer do a take on the cold, muddy set, then scramble back to chairs placed under the comfort of heat lamps. Coates continued, “You can get from one dome to the next; there are portals. Even the Zone is now covered by a dome. At the same time, it’s still a ruin. Cale is part of the underground economy there. One of the great visual jokes in the movie is a big pile of iMac shells in the Zone. It’s a mercenary world. They’re horse-trading to survive, making do with the cast-offs from society.”

Coates spoke of another of the soundstage sets. “At the same time, when you first see Spence’s house, you’ll go, ‘Oh my, I want to live there.’ It’s futuristic, and it’s utilitarian, but

it’s really beautiful, really nice.” Coates is thrilled about the film, the design of which has taken a lot of his time since finishing the production design on *STIR OF ECHOES*.

Grossberg, like others working on the film, is quick to point out that this is a character-driven, not an effects-driven film. “There are about the same number of special effect shots in this film as there were in *BICENTENNIAL MAN*,” Grossberg explained. “Around 130 shots. There’s a very gory scene in which we see another Impostor having a U-bomb, the bomb that the aliens implanted, removed. Essentially it’s a vivisection scene. Very grisly.”

We may never see the aliens, but we do hear them. “When the Centauri message is intercepted, we hear it played back. On a screen we see alien lettering, and we hear the Centauri language. It’s very eerie,” Grossberg said. “On occasion, one of the Centauri’s needle ships will penetrate a dome. We see a crashed needle ship, but not one flying. There aren’t really space shots, except those from vantage points to show the domes. There was a scene written where an asteroid was attacked, but it was cut.”

Joe Grossberg is most pleased with his most recent special effects work in *MAGNOLIA*, and his fine science fiction and horror effects can be seen in such films as *ALIEN RESURRECTION* and *SPECIES II*.

“I spent two years working on the creatures for the remake of *CREATURE FROM THE BLACK LAGOON*,” he said. “It was my baby. Then Universal decided not to make the picture. I was crushed.” But at least for Grossberg there’s his work on *IMPOSTOR*, a film designed to raise the standards for thinking-person’s science fiction films. □

The METROPOLIS shot: one of twenty matte paintings contributed by ILM artists to establish Philip K. Dick’s futuristic world, set seventy-five years in the future.



SHAD

John Malkovich

by Alan Jones

It's one of the most famous horror films of all time. And now the making of director F.W. Murnau's 1922 silent masterpiece *NOSFERATU* is being used as the backdrop for a new fantasy movie exploring the terror of creativity and the very vampiric nature of film itself. Made over a six week period in Luxembourg, *SHADOW OF THE VAMPIRE* posits the notion that the homosexual Murnau cast a real vampire when he chose actor Max Schreck to play the lead character Count Orlock in his virtual steal of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*.

Only he didn't tell anyone else that. How he kept it a secret while his trusting cast started suffering from anemia and mysterious neck bites is the unusual avenue director Elias Merhige's bio-fictional symphony of terror explores with artful grace and jet black humor as it lays bare the extreme lengths Murnau took to craft the archetypal undead myth.

Schreck's chilling Count Orlock look remains one of the most frightening vampire incarnations in cinema history. His grasping claws, pointed fangs, bald pate and white cadaverous features is a genre icon which influenced numerous generations of filmmakers. In more recent times, Tobe Hooper's *SALEM'S LOT* (1979) borrowed the visage for actor Reggie Nalder and Francis Coppola used wholesale chunks of Murnau's imagery for *BRAM STOKER'S DRACULA* (1992). But *SHADOW OF THE VAMPIRE* is much more than a lesson about the early days of German expressionism, the *GODS AND MONSTERS* in Murnau's life or a behind-the-scenes biography of the other major players in the *NOSFERATU* saga, like producer Albin Grau, writer Henrik Galeen and co-stars Greta Schroeder and Gustav von Wangenheim.

"*SHADOW OF THE VAMPIRE* is not an homage to Murnau or silent cinema," said Elias Merhige. "It's not even totally accurate to history. I'm using Murnau as a way of communicating what the idea of cre-

Top: The vampire closes in on Eddie Izzard as Gustav von Wangenheim, playing Harker. Middle: Udo Kier as *NOSFERATU* producer Albin Grau with Malkovich as Murnau. Bottom: Menacing Catherine McCormack as Greta Schroeder, filming the finale.



OW OF THE VAMPIRE

as Murnau in the story behind NOSFERATU.

ative genius has become in the 20th century. Our creativity has become so ferocious and so beyond our comprehension that we are terrorizing ourselves with it. Atomic bombs and germ warfare are more blatant examples, but I wanted to explore the vampiric nature of the cinematic medium. Here you have this black box, invented after the Industrial Revolution, that captures shadows of the living and projects them back into a dark room with transfixing results. That's why this century is so unique to all others. We are permanently being transformed through this self-consciousness and are able to look at ourselves, study ourselves and export culture, behavior, ideas and feelings. I find that totally amazing and it's what lies at the crux of the movie."

If Merhige's name sounds familiar it's probably because you are one of the few people who've actually seen his debut feature *BEGOTTEN*. The Lebanese-born Merhige used his medical school enrollment money to make the 1991 slice of avant-garde horror about God killing himself, Mother Earth taking his seed and their resulting offspring being abused by the denizens of a just-forming technocracy. Grainy, stark, shocking and dialogue-free, *BEGOTTEN* pays homage to Thomas Edison, the Keystone Cops, Tennessee Williams, Jean-Luc Godard and Herschell Gordon Lewis, and is a once seen never forgotten experience. Revered critic Susan Sontag and director Werner Herzog (coincidentally the man who remade *NOSFERATU* in 1979 with Klaus Kinski) have both hailed *BEGOTTEN* as one of the millennium's best movies even though it has only ever played on the midnight movie cult circuit in America and has never been released in Europe.

It was *BEGOTTEN* which landed Merhige the *SHADOW OF THE VAMPIRE* assignment through one of the luckiest breaks any fledgling filmmaker could possibly wish for. It was all because actress Patricia Arquette bought a video of *BEGOTTEN* as



Willem Dafoe as Max Schreck, which the script suggests was a real vampire, attacks Malkovich as Murnau. Lion's Gate opens the film September 22.

a birthday present for her Oscar-winning husband Nicolas Cage three years ago. Noted Merhige, "Nic is a big fan of silent cinema and black-and-white movies. He watched *BEGOTTEN*, fell in love with its originality, found out I was living in Los Angeles and asked to meet me. He'd just started this production company a few months before and figured if I was halfway sane, there might be something they'd like me to work on."

Cage's production company is called Saturn Films and his partner in the venture is Jeff Levine, a part-time actor who appeared in a multitude of fantasy B-movies like *HIDE AND GO SHRIEK*, *LUCKY STIFF*, *CHERRY 2000*, *THE HIDDEN* and *A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET*. Recalled Levine, "I met Nic on *VALLEY GIRL* and we became firm friends. We talked for several years about starting a production company and it reached a point, in 1995, when Nic was having incredible box-office success and critical acclaim that we figured now was a good time to realize the dream. Nic loved the planet Saturn. I used to tell people I was from Saturn as a joke when I was a child, too. So we chose Saturn as the company name. We decided to build up script material and learn the business and soon we had an overhead deal with Disney. I do feel they saw Nic as always starring in every film we made. But we didn't

want him to act in every single project we were setting up. Sure, he would be our first casting choice if the part was right for him, but we didn't want to be constricted to that avenue."

SHADOW OF THE VAMPIRE was Saturn's first script purchase. "It had been written over 12 years ago by Steve Katz who has since become a script doctor and worked on *INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE*," said Levine. "He was a big vampire, Murnau and horror fan and I thought the script was wonderful as it was about a man willing to sacrifice everything for his art. But we put it on the back burner because it seemed such a difficult film to launch for obvious reasons and also Disney passed on it. Yet it represented a certain quality level that we, as Saturn, wanted to be known for. The script was film business specific, with plenty to excite the buff insider, but it still told a great story everyone could appreciate."

Enter Cage with the idea of meeting Elias Merhige to see if the *SHADOW OF THE VAMPIRE* script was something he would be keen to tackle. Since *BEGOTTEN*, Merhige had forged a commercials and rock video career based on that unique offering—Marilyn Manson's "Anti-Christ Superstar" being just one of the latter—and he also found himself in and out of development deals with the usual Hollywood suspects. Merhige remarked, "Sure, I could have made a film before *SHADOW OF THE VAMPIRE*, but I'm a bit worried about dealing with a medium that commits an idea to eternity. There's a responsibility when you create something that's going to outlive you. I couldn't bear anything I did to be less than great. It's a privilege being a film director. It's not something anyone deserves to be doing. You are the caretaker of the collective dream of humanity, so you must use images with respect."

He continued, "I actually had another script I was keen on doing and felt meeting up with Nic might push it in the right direction. Nic was interested but politely asked me to read the *SHADOW OF THE VAMPIRE*



Recreating the filming of Murnau's 1922 silent masterpiece, one of the most famous horror films of all time, shooting at Delux Studios and on locations in Luxembourg, a production of Nicolas Cage's Saturn Films.

and I became completely besotted by it because, by deconstructing the making of NOSFERATU, it created a new mythology around the idea of creating images. It was also about an art form in its infancy in a Germany soon to face a dramatic loss of innocence. Irresistible. I've always loved the idea of there being total order inside the lights, but beyond the camera there is total chaos. The script explored that and I felt there was something important to say about image-making and the early practitioners of the art."

He added, "Plus, Nic and I hit it off very well, and you do have to like the people you work with in this business. Nic and Jeff are both artists and no matter how far out on a limb I've gone with my vision, they've supported me 100%. I can't tell you how rare and amazing that is. Nic came over to the Luxembourg locations just before he began starring in GONE IN 60 SECONDS, and just as I started shooting he took me aside and said, 'Elias, I just want you to know we're behind you all the way and whatever you want we will do anything we can to make sure you get it.' Nic hired me because he believed in me, not because he wanted to control what I did. They've taken an enormous leap of faith by enabling me to make the movie and I know I owe my career to Nic and Jeff."

Jeff Levine added, "I don't think hiring Elias is too much of a leap of faith, actually. From the moment we first met it was clear that he had a blistering visual prowess and mastery of the craft without any prejudice towards the conventions of filmmaking. Plus, we hit it off on a friendship level, too. We are both obsessed with inventors and spent the first hour of our

meeting talking about Tesla! From a little cult movie with no dialogue, to a major motion picture in the narrative arena is a massive jump. But I want Saturn to be known for recognizing new talent and creating new directors. Elias fits that brief precisely and his initial attitude was a breath of fresh air. When I told him he'd have to adhere to a punishing schedule and a tight budget and tailor his creativity to those restrictions, he said, 'I don't care what we shoot the movie on. I'll use a fucking sewing machine if it's right for the film!' Class. A great moment in our relationship and I knew we had stumbled on someone great."

Shooting started on SHADOW OF THE VAMPIRE on April 8, 1999 at Delux Studios and on location in the rest of Luxembourg. The tax breaks in the tiny European country allowed the \$6 million budget to stretch another \$2 million. Starring in the film, which at one time was titled BURNED TO LIGHT (a photographic expression popular with Murnau), are John Malkovich (MARY REILLY) as Murnau, Willem Dafoe (NEW ROSE HOTEL) as Schreck (Katz had writ-

Malkovich as Murnau and Udo Kier as his producer Albin Grau, prepare to slate a shot. Murnau bankrupted Grau's studio because his film plagiarized *Dracula*.



“[Merhige] said, ‘I’ll use a fucking sewing machine if it’s right for the film!’ A great moment... I knew we had stumbled on someone great.”

—Co-producer Jeff Levine—

ten his script with Dafoe in mind), Udo Kier (BLADE) as Grau, John Gillett as Galeen, Catherine McCormack (BRAVEHEART) as Greta, Eddie Izzard (THE AVENGERS) as Gustav and Cary Elwes (ROBIN HOOD: MEN IN TIGHTS) as Fritz Arno Wagner, the NOSFERATU cinematographer.

Malkovich was crucial to raising the finance for SHADOW OF THE VAMPIRE, according to Levine. "Nic had worked with John on CON AIR and through that connection asked him to read the script. He loved it and after meeting Elias agreed to star. It doesn't go like that normally and he made everything else fall into place."

Merhige added, "I was immediately impressed that the script had attracted the attention of someone like John Malkovich. I was nervous the first time I met him, and Willem for that matter. I was convinced they'd look at me and say, 'You're not a proper director, get out of here!' But meeting them both was like meeting old friends and they responded to the script brilliantly. I spent a week with John in Paris in January where we rewrote some of the script and rehearsed. I needed to get him pregnant with the Murnau I wanted to put on screen and by the time he arrived on the set he had a hundred other thoughts and inspirations. I know he plays a director in the movie, and he is a director in his own right too, but I never got fazed by directing John directing NOSFERATU within the framework of our story."

Noted Malkovich, "Some movies you do for capitalistic reasons—we all have to make a living—others you do because you

really want to make a contribution. I absolutely loved the SHADOW OF THE VAMPIRE script and everyone else is also making this movie because they want to. Although I did read up on Murnau, I didn't really think it was necessary to give an accurate portrayal of the man as we are dealing with a fictional drama. But I do love NOSFERATU and I feel we are doing the movie justice. I did read Jim Shepard's romance *Nosferatu in Love* to get a handle on Murnau in broad strokes but, in truth, I got the most inspiration from Werner Herzog's BURDEN OF

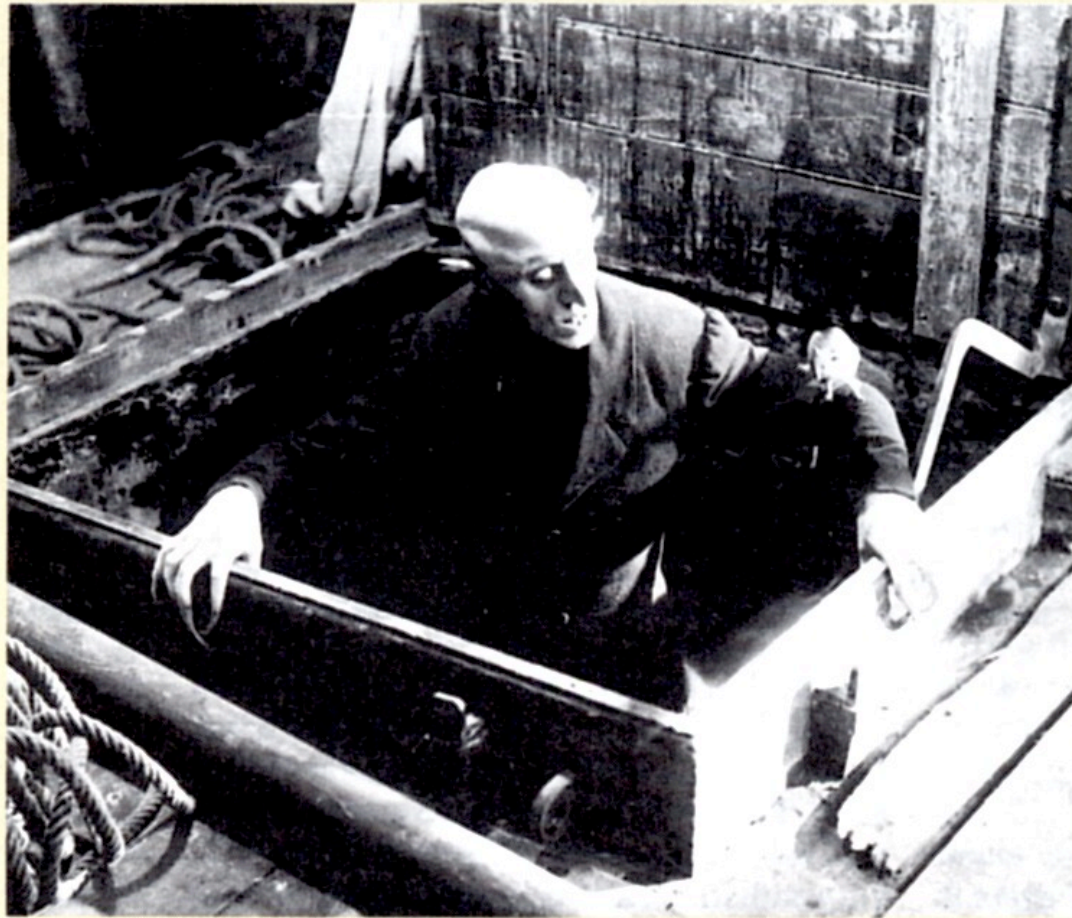
NOSFERATU

F. W. Murnau pioneered the Expressionistic style of silent movie-making, defining the future of horror.

By Alan Jones

Well before Tod Browning directed DRACULA and James Whale breathed life into FRANKENSTEIN, F.W. Murnau pioneered the Expressionist style of silent movie making and set the atmospheric seal on the future imagery of the horror genre. Though most of his early work is lost, his enduring legacy is NOSFERATU: A SYMPHONY OF HORROR (1921) which caused contemporary German audiences to shudder and women to faint as Murnau took his tale of terror out of THE CABINET OF CALIGARI's abstract setting and placed it in real locations for maximum impact. Count Orlock's shadow climbing the stairs, his disappearance in a puff of smoke, his wide-eyed icy stare into the camera lens: such scenes proved unforgettable and are still being copied today. One of the three undisputed masters of German cinema alongside Fritz Lang and Ernst Lubitsch, both Alfred Hitchcock and Orson Welles cited Murnau as their major influence with regards to their own oblique angles, sinister atmospheres and prowling camera movements.

It was NOSFERATU that brought him international recognition in which Max Schreck, playing Count Orlock, visited Bremen causing a reign of terror in the town and heroine Nina (Greta Schroeder) to question the darker side of her sexuality. Scripted by Henrik Galeen (who later turned director himself with the Edgar Allan Poe adaptation THE STUDENT OF PRAGUE in 1926), and produced and designed by the spiritualist Albin Grau, NOSFERATU was a flagrant copy of Bram Stoker's best-selling novel *Dracula*. Stoker's estate was not pleased when they realized how blatant a rip-off it actually was and sued the German producers. But although an English court ordered all copies of the film to be burned, the legislation was unenforceable in Germany, and from that



Max Schreck as the vampire Count Orlock in Murnau's classic, arriving in England on a shipwreck, the only one of Murnau's silents that has survived.

moment on numerous butchered versions began circulating thanks to the panicked producers selling all the prints, plus outtakes, to Deutsche Film Produktion.

It was one of these hack jobs that was eventually released in America in 1929. Critics fell over themselves to hail NOSFERATU as a masterpiece, mainly because of the relationship between Orlock and Greta. For she abandons herself to the emaciated corpse-like Count with chilling ecstasy solely to destroy the repressed evil he represents. Nothing remotely like it, or as frightening, had ever been seen before in America despite the sterling work of Lon Chaney Sr.

Murnau's last German movie was FAUST (1926). However, it was the comedy he made prior to that which cemented his reputation as a director of immense talent. THE LAST LAUGH (1924) starred Emil Jannings as a pompous doorman demoted to lavatory attendant and was remarkable for its daring use of subjective camera techniques. Murnau put his cinematographer Karl Freund on roller-skates to give the central character's drunken impression of a wedding party.

On the strength of his body of work, Murnau was signed by the Fox Studio in 1927. His first American film for them was the lyrical masterpiece SUNRISE that same year, which used moving cameras and dream-like contrasts of light and shade to tell its melodramatic story of George O'Brien planning to kill his wife, Janet Gaynor, only to realize in the nick of time, that she's his one true love. Although a box office flop, it won Oscars for Best Actress, photography and Unique Artistic Achievement, at the very first ever Academy Awards ceremony.

The less remarkable THE FOUR DEVILS (1928) and OUR DAILY BREAD/CITY GIRL (1929) followed and then Murnau joined forces with celebrated documentary director

Robert Flaherty to make TABU (1931). The movie about a pearl diver in the South Seas went disastrously wrong in production, the two directors fought constantly and eventually Murnau bought Flaherty out of the project. The week before its premiere Murnau died in an infamous car crash that ensured scandal would forever be linked to his name. Discreetly homosexual, the sweet-natured Murnau had numerous male lovers throughout his life and often insisted that the entire cast and crew on his movies should all be gay or lesbian. Allegedly, it was Murnau practicing oral sex on his 14-year-old valet/chauffeur Garcia Stevenson, driving a Packard on Santa Barbara's Highway 101, that caused the fateful smash costing both their lives. His best friend Greta Garbo requested a death mask of Murnau when she heard of his demise. The rest of the world only had his films to remember him by. But NOSFERATU remains as a testament to the man who quoted Jean Cocteau's statement "Cinema is the registration of death at work" as his own mantra and minted much of the mythic menace still being plundered by today's filmmakers. □

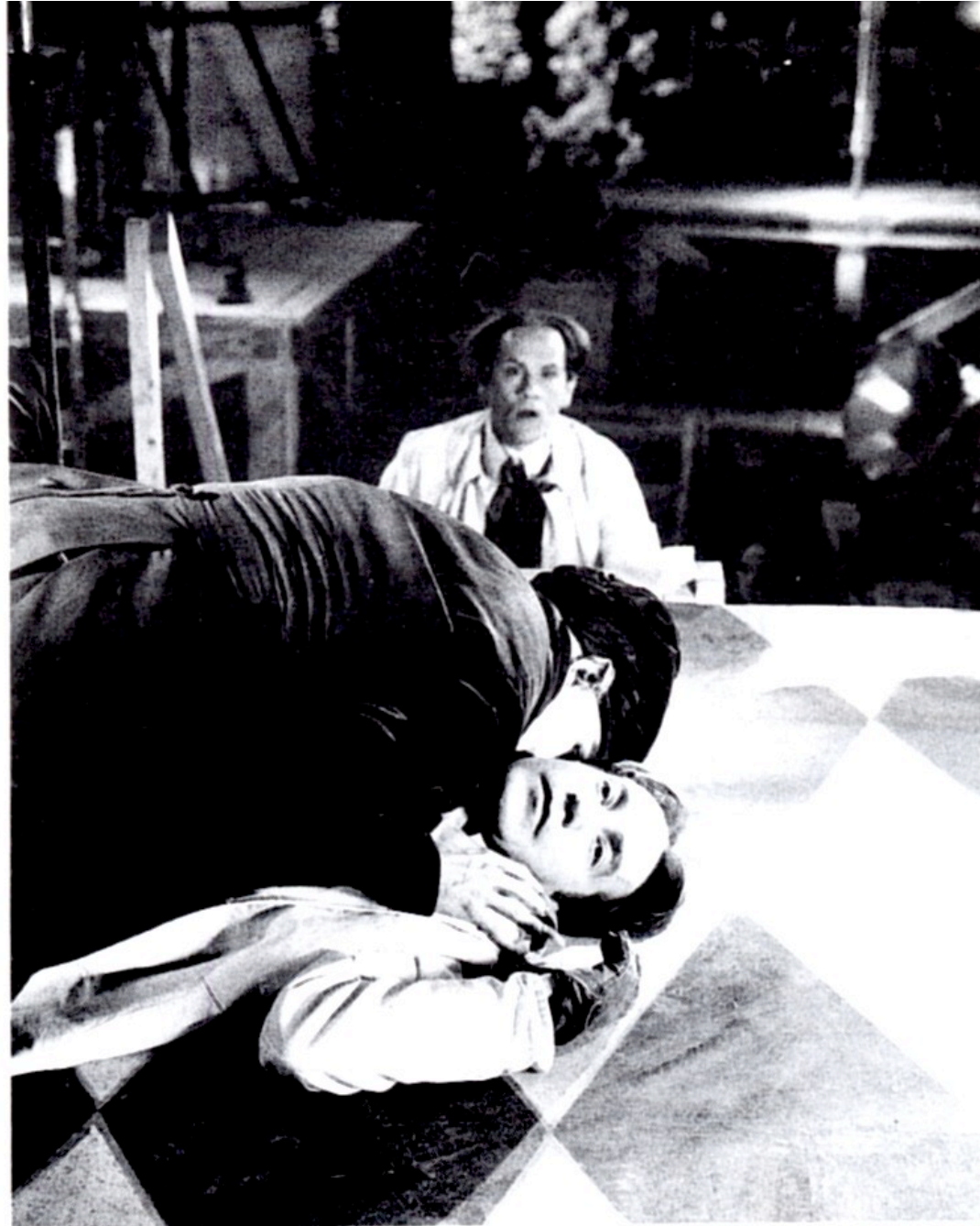
DREAMS [the documentary on the making of FITZCARRALDO]. That film raised the thorny issue of why anyone would risk his life, and other's lives, for art. Murnau is the same as Herzog in that regard—I'm going to make this vampire movie, and if you all die because I've cast a real vampire in it, sorry, but I'm busy, I've got an artistic masterpiece to make."

Malkovich met the Merhige in Paris, Malkovich's home, to discuss the changes Malkovich wanted to make in the script. "I liked Elias the moment we met," said Malkovich. "He's collaborative and doesn't have what we call in California 'Control Issues.' As a director myself, I have given him my considered opinion which he's either excited by or rejects completely. That's fine, but at least he listens and that has been a blissful relief from the norm, I can tell you. Do people care about Murnau or NOSFERATU these days? Probably not. But audiences will have an interest in the subject matter as long as the film is good. And we have been working ourselves to death to make sure it is. NOSFERATU represented the first images and attempts at the horror genre, so buffs are going to love the picture. The rest are bound to be moved by its powerful elegance, scalpel-sharp humor and Greek tragedy elements that Elias has been at pains to establish."

Murnau was born Frederick Wilhelm Plumpe in 1888. After studying in Berlin and Heidelberg during his teenage years, he won a scholarship place with Max Reinhardt's famous Berlin Theatre Company. His theatrical career was cut short by World War I, when he entered the German Air Force as a fighter pilot and was interned after making a forced landing in Switzerland. On his return to Germany in 1919, he became a film director and made his feature debut with *THE BOY IN BLUE*.

NOSFERATU is the only one of Murnau's early movies to survive. Amongst an eclectic mix of intriguing titles, including *SATANAS* (1919), *CASTLE VOGELOD* (1924) and *TARTUFFE* (1924), is Murnau's version of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde *DER JANUSKOPF/LOVE'S MOCKERY* with one of the earliest recorded performances by horror icon Bela Lugosi, who played headliner Conrad Veidt's butler.

Merhige didn't do too much research on Murnau either mainly because of the script's part fact/part fiction premise and also because he knew a lot already as the director is one of his favorites. Merhige said, "He was a sweet, worldly, cultured man



Murnau watches while Dafoe as Schreck victimizes Ronan Vibert as Muller, the cinematographer. Screenwriter Steve Katz wrote the film with Dafoe in mind.

who never did anything wrong, yet he had a lot of conflicts within himself, mainly due to his homosexuality, which was a daring lifestyle choice for the era. We actually depict him as bisexual in the movie. He was very sadistic towards his actresses and did odd things, like make them wear shoes a few sizes too small so they'd be in constant pain. I do feel I collectively tapped into the truth unconsciously here. In a fashion this is a historical record of the way *NOSFERATU* was made because only when you take the past and are irreverent with it do you penetrate its essence and uncover the absolute truth."

Being German, Udo Kier naturally did know a lot about Murnau and his starring role as Albin Grau, Murnau's mentor and the larger-than-life producer, really excited him. The actor who will always be remembered for his outrageous performances in *ANDY WARHOL'S DRACULA* and *ANDY WARHOL'S FRANKENSTEIN* made *SHADOW OF THE VAMPIRE* side by side in Luxembourg with *THE NEW ADVENTURES OF PINOCCHIO*, the Michael Anderson directed sequel to Steve Barron's original from 1996.

"It was so strange," he said. "Some German filmmakers had been after me to star as Murnau in the real Murnau story centered around his tragically erotic death. But I don't think they could get the budget together. Then I was working on *BLADE* and one of the floor managers, Orian Williams, showed me *BEGOTTEN* and told me he too was working on a Murnau film. It was an

extraordinary coincidence. I absolutely loved *BEGOTTEN*—which is so indescribably out there—I couldn't miss the opportunity of working with Elias. And when I found out John Malkovich was starring..."

Although Kier knew all about Murnau, he knew absolutely nothing about Grau. "So Elias sent me a ten-page biography about him. It was then I got scared because he was a far more complex person than I expected and I was frightened of doing him justice. Grau literally created Murnau. He not only found the money to make the movie—from very dubious sources it's claimed—he drew the film posters, wrote books about him, designed the costumes, stole ideas from paintings and told Murnau where to use them, especially the claw-like hand imagery."

Noted Kier, "Both men were obsessed by *NOSFERATU* and that's what I decided to play on instead of the reality of the man. It's not supposed to be true fact after all. Grau bank-

rupted the studio which made *NOSFERATU* because it plagiarized *Dracula*. But we don't go into that, only the fantasy of what making the actual movie may have been like, which is a wonderful take on the subject. *SHADOW OF THE VAMPIRE* has been one of the most enjoyable films I've made in my career and, let's face it, I've appeared in some pretty awful ones!"

Cary Elwes agreed with Kier over the excitement all the actors have felt over this unique project. The *KISS THE GIRLS* star who, just prior to *SHADOW OF THE VAMPIRE*, ironically played another real life cinematic figure—John Houseman in *RKO 281*, the cable movie about the making of *CITIZEN KANE*, said, "We're all getting paid peanuts for being in Luxembourg. So you have to do it for the love of the project. In my case it was the combination of the script and Elias. The premise was funny, dark and a great flight of fancy—taking *NOSFERATU* and literally turning it on its head. Hollywood is so bereft of imagination these days it's a shock when such an original idea comes along. I also studied Murnau and film expressionism at college so I was well up to speed on the background."

Elwes plays director of photography Fritz Arno Wagner in *SHADOW OF THE VAMPIRE* and arrives on the scene in a biplane in one of the film's most spectacular moments. "In reality Wagner was the cinematographer throughout the whole shooting of *NOSFERATU*," said Elwes. "But here I come in to replace Muller [Ronan Vibert]

“[This film] begins like opera and ends in Greek tragedy. In the last 20 minutes it gets so visceral you’ll laugh before becoming scared to death.”

—Director Elias Merhige—

who is one of Schreck’s first victims. I found an article Wagner wrote about sound movies and realized he was just as obsessed with film as I am. Photos from the era show that we looked quite alike, too. People do keep comparing *SHADOW OF THE VAMPIRE* to *GODS AND MONSTERS* and while I can appreciate the superficial similarity, it is totally different in tone and thrust. It’s more like a silent era *DAY FOR NIGHT* or *LIVING IN OBLIVION* than that. We take a real film and explore the possible resonance of it while staying in the realm of actually making it. A picture within a picture with the creepiest power and hilarious humor.”

Bringing his own brand of wry humor to the *SHADOW OF THE VAMPIRE* table is British transvestite comedian Eddie Izzard. He plays Gustav von Wangenheim who plays the Jonathan Harker character in *NOSFERATU*. Izzard joked, “I’m the dickhead who goes to the vampire and says, ‘I’ve got this house, a really nice property, I think you’ll like it. Oh, what big teeth you’ve got. Oh, what a big castle. Hey, how do I get out of here?’ Basically, I’m a Twenties estate agent. I should have the equivalent of a German mobile phone, a can on a string! Funny how in vampire films no one will go near the castle except the postman. ‘Yeah, I’ll take it on horseback, no problem.’”

Two other factors are set to make *SHADOW OF THE VAMPIRE* unique. Because Saturn Films have bought the rights to the original *NOSFERATU*, Merhige cleverly intercuts footage from that classic into his own film as Malkovich/Murnau is seen directing it. The recreations have been shot with an iris lens so the shift into the actual *NOSFERATU* footage will be seamless. Dafoe made-up to look the spitting image of Schreck as Count Orlock completes the deception which Merhige also highlights with a new film process. “A bleach bypass operation is sometimes used to soften celluloid colors,” he explained. “But what I’m basically doing here is optically marrying both the color and black-and-white negatives together for the final look. Black-and-white is the



Child of the night Ingeborg Dapkunate. Noted director Elias Merhige, “This is a frightening and funny movie about lifting the veil off the filmmaking process, showing how absurd and obsessive it truly is.”

skeleton of the image and it will be as if color is bleeding into a monochrome image—like the life-blood is seeping back in. Not to sound too pretentious or arty but I am applying Goethe’s 19th-century theory of colors which laid the ground rules of the psychological mood you can create with the rainbow palette. Because of this method, I’m doing all the special visual effects myself as I did on *BEGOTTEN*, where I made my own optical printer. My hope is that *SHADOW OF THE VAMPIRE* will look like a lost film found in some dusty old vault.”

But away from all the Murnau/*NOSFERATU* trivia, it’s important to everyone that *SHADOW OF THE VAMPIRE* stands alone as a great piece of entertainment in its own right. Levine stated, “Our film is on a far bigger canvas than *GODS AND MONSTERS*, although I know comparisons will inevitably be made. It’s much more than a film about a director making a film—as irresponsibly fictionalized as it is! We literally accuse Murnau of making a snuff movie because he offers up his leading lady to a real vampire who everyone else thinks is an

actor. It’s Murnau’s journey and something of a study of the nature of genius that operates on numerous sub-textual levels.”

Merhige added, “I know what I’m saying sounds lofty and intellectual but basically this is a frightening and funny movie about lifting the veil off the filmmaking process and showing what an absurd, organic and obsessive process it truly is. Filmmaking in the ’20s wasn’t an art, it was a science, and that’s the reason why I show the crew wearing lab coats. So these scientific conquistadors go into the wilderness and try to manipulate this freak—this vampire—in their film experiment like a guinea pig. But everything goes wrong because as they walk into the jungle they become worse than the jungle predators themselves and destroy everything around them. My central idea in the film is that cinema is a force, like a railroad, that tears down jungles and forests and changes everything in its path.”

He continued, “I think *SHADOW OF THE VAMPIRE* will be commercial. Audiences are far smarter than Hollywood gives them credit for, and they want stories to inform and bend their mind. This will definitely do that. It begins like opera and ends in Greek tragedy. In the last 20 minutes, it gets so visceral that you’ll laugh before becoming scared to death. If I’ve judged it right, the finale will move you into a whole new space you didn’t know existed or believe was there. It’s a difficult tone to achieve but the movie should exist on the sharpest of chilling knife edges. It’s not intellectually smart-ass or trying to be clever, it’s just organic, sincere, and hopefully very frightening.” □

Merhige directs Malkovich as Murnau. Noted Malkovich, “Some movies you do for [the money], others you do because you want to make a contribution.”



X-FILES

When a show works best as self-parody, it's time to shut off the transporter beam.

By Thomas Doherty

After seven seasons, the murky excursion into alien abductions, '60s-era assassinations, and labyrinthine bureaucracies known as THE X-FILES is facing its gravest threat: the male half of the delusional duo of Fox Mulder (David Duchovny) and Dana Scully (Gillian Anderson) has been scooped up and placed in suspended animation by beings from the remote star system of Tea Leoni. Can Mulder be rescued from the netherworld of celebrity matrimony and beamed back to his lonely-guy apartment and platonic partnership? Can Scully transfer her doe-eyed devotion to another passive-aggressive love god?

But first, some backstory. In 1963—note the year—the historian Richard Hofstadter wrote a famous essay entitled “*The Paranoid Style in American Politics*,” the thesis of which was that a nearly pathological dread of unseen forces and secret cabals has been a recurrent theme throughout American history. From the Salem Witch Trials, to the anti-immigrant Know-Nothings of the 19th century, and forward to the anti-Communist hysteria of the McCarthy era, Americans have blamed aliens in their midst for the troubles in their psyche.

Never latent for long in



The “Millennium” buss, a partnership in the comfortable groove of a modern two-career marriage—mutually supportive, professionally rewarding and utterly sexless.

American culture, the paranoid style returned with a vengeance in the 1990s. The symbolic touchstones were two motion pictures from the fevered brow of director Oliver Stone, JFK (1991) and NIXON (1995). In the Stoned universe, the yin and yang of 1960s politics and presidential personalities collapsed into the same black hole of mad hatter hallucinations (“Through the looking glass, people!”). Stone promulgated what the *New York Times* sardonically dubbed the Grand Unified Conspiracy Theory, a concoction of all the *au courant* targets of fixation lurking in the cobwebs of suspicions minds. CIA, KGB, FBI, NRA, IBM, LCN, RJR—

pick the nefarious initials, toss them in the air, and the alphabet soup that turns up can only mean one thing.

Cultural-historically speaking—and not coincidentally—the buyer’s market in conspiracy theory that exploded in the 1990s paralleled the proliferation of a quite visible “unseen force” burrowing into American homes and office space. No, not cable television—the computer, the channeling device for the all-too-symbolically named Worldwide Web. Cyberspace, not outer space, is the real impulse behind the show’s paranoid style. Computer codes, computer screens, and computer nerds spread like an e-mail

virus through the plotting and *mise en scene* of THE X-FILES.

Chris Carter’s genius was to adapt the paranoid style to the 60-minute deadlines of a weekly series. Basically, THE X-FILES is The FBI Story with Cancer Man in the J. Edgar Hoover role: a police procedural that provides conventional closure each hour but that remains open-ended in the long run. Just as the FBI will always have crime, Scully and Mulder will always have conspiracy. To really solve the puzzle behind the Grand Scheme or expose the pattern under the paranormality would be to implode the world according to THE X-FILES—

where it is always 12:30 on the grassy knoll and mangled ET’s lie on slabs in a secret military base, where shadowy figures, lit by beams of flashlight, haunt the chilly twilight of a British Columbia forest, and where Cancer Man, a kind of FOREST GUMP of great locations in conspiracy history (Roswell, Dealy Plaza, Area 51), blows smoke rings, literally and figuratively, in the face of sanity.

Fortunately, the wiggled-out philosophy underpinning the show has always been less important than the charismatic lead players, a man and a woman with dual loyalties and divergent agenda. At once agents of the state and double



Season-ender "Requiem," less a cliffhanger than preview of coming attractions, leaves Scully fertile with an immaculate conception and Mulder lost in space.

agents, Scully and Mulder used their FBI badges to subvert the bureaucracy they served. Cunningly, Carter pulled a neat reversal on gendered expectations: Scully, the attractive redhead, was the scientific rationalist. Mulder, the button-down male, was the intuitive, quirky believer, a guy who glimpsed the paranormal in every burst of static electricity.

Year after year, as the pair rifled through ever more baroque folders in the X-FILES, the real dramatic tension had nothing to do with the loopy melange of left wing and right wing gibberish too convoluted to keep straight without a flow chart. From the pilot episode onwards, the most eagerly anticipated probing involved Mulder and Scully, not a lab-coated alien and a backwoods hick. During tender moments in the morgue, sublimat-

ed passions radiated from Mulder while Scully, scalpel in hand, dug out an organ chronicled in no medical textbook. Yet sometime during the last season or so, the moment passed for an extended heterosexual link-up between Scully and Mulder. The partnership settled into the comfortable groove of a modern two career marriage—mutually supportive, professionally rewarding, and utterly sexless. When Mulder invites Scully over for popcorn and a video of PLAN 9 FROM OUTER SPACE (he watches the porn alone), they're like brother and sister.

Not surprisingly, then, the much-hyped seventh season finale was less a cliffhanger than a preview of coming attractions. Finally, Mulder has himself been abducted. Over the years, he must have felt so rejected as his sister, his partner, and every

THE TRUTH IS OUT THERE

"No longer going for the big chill, Carter and company are winking at their audience, a sign it is time to put away the metallic anal probes and send this ship off to orbit in syndication."

inept cop in rural America was selected for an extraterrestrial joy ride while he, the true believer, was left with nothing but ashes and slime to send back to the FBI lab for analysis. Not to be outdone, the once-barren Scully has become the fertile vessel for an immaculate conception. "I'm pregnant," she declared in the sign off line to the last episode. (Who—or what?—is the father? And did he smoke a cigarette afterward?) Ever since the infamous tattoo-to-her backside episode, the feminization and sexualization of Scully has been a narrative twist waiting to play out as a trump card. Having finally admitted that she has seen too much to play the skeptic, Scully has evolved into a more vulnerable and emotionally dependent woman...Next season, one suspects, she will be recast as the true believer and her new partner—a plant? can he be trusted?—will be the skeptic as they search for a freeze-dried or post-traumatically stressed Mulder.

"The truth is out there," read the t-shirts and "I want to believe," pleads the poster in Mulder's office. Both slogans hint at another truth behind THE X-FILES. More terrifying than the notion of "a conspiracy

so immense and an infamy so black as to dwarf any previous venture in the history of man" (as no less a conspiracy buff than Senator Joseph McCarthy once put it) is the thought that the whole shebang is a mundane event or a random accident—that the UFO really is a weather balloon or a lone gunman with a lousy Italian-made rifle can change the course of American history with a single bullet.

Perhaps this is why the most entertaining episodes lately have been the self parodies, where killer cockroaches scurry and living dead roam, or where (in the Duchovny written and directed episode) Scully and Mulder are played by Tea Leoni and Garry Shandling in a motion picture only slightly more ludicrous than a 1998 motion picture called THE X-FILES. No longer going for the big chill, Carter and company are winking at their audience, as if to say: even we can't pretend to believe in this muddled mish-mash anymore. But only a member of a vast CFQ conspiracy would have the audacity to suggest that when a show works best as self-parody, it is time to shut off the transporter beam, put away the metallic anal probes, and send the ship out to orbit in syndication. □

Scully and Mulder, played by Garry Shandling and Tea Leoni in "Hollywood A.D.," filming a movie only slightly more ludicrous than 1998's THE X-FILES.



THE X-FILES SEASON SEVEN EPISODE GUIDE

By Paula Vitaris

"In the source of every illness lies its cure."
—Scully

SIXTH EXTINCTION ★1/2

11/7/99. Written by Chris Carter. Directed by Kim Manners. Editor: Louise Innes.

Picks up from last season's finale, "Biogenesis," with Scully still in the Ivory Coast, examining the spaceship she found buried in the sand at the beach, and hoping it contains clues to curing Mulder, who is back in Washington, falling ever more ill from a mysterious brain disorder. Scully finds that the ship is covered with writing and symbols in ancient (human) languages containing both religions inscriptions from different faiths as well as complex scientific information, such as a map of the complete human genome. The ship also has mysterious powers, bringing on Biblical plagues and miracles (the sea boils and turns to blood, locusts appear, the dead are brought back to life).

In Washington, Mulder manages to tell Skinner to find Kritschgau (John Finn). Once Kritschgau gets a look at Mulder, he claims he is experiencing the same symptoms of people who he'd seen in an experiment on remote viewing. He gives Mulder a drug that brings him out of his coma and demonstrates with a computer test that Mulder now has amazing pre-cognitive abilities.

This season-opener seems to be marking time more than anything else. Scully lingers in Africa, learning what we've already been told in "The Beginning," "The End" and THE X-FILES movie: humans may be of alien origin. The ship's ability to bring on Biblical plagues and raise the dead results in a gratuitous zombie-kills-Dr. Barnes scene. Scully doesn't even try to explain this scientifically, but then, why should she? She's slowly coming around to believing in aliens—until the next non-mythology episode, where she conveniently will be a skeptic again—and apparently the aliens need no scientific explanation, they are beyond our ken, sort of like God. The spaceship mysteriously disappears at the end of the episode, smacking dreadfully of plot device, as does Scully's vision of the old African man telling her some truths are not meant for her. One would hope that such a pronouncement would bring out the bulldog in Scully, but, no—it's back to the U.S. for the good doctor. In other words, since the writers can't think of a better way to get her to pack up, a vision will have to provide the motivation.

Mulder's situation is handled just as poorly.

CSM and Mimi Rogers as Diana Fowley experiment on Mulder in "Amor Fati," carrying the Christian symbolism to ridiculous lengths.



Skinner tends stricken Mulder in season opener "Sixth Extinction," suffering from a mysterious brain disorder that gives him precognition.

The spaceship rubbing has activated previously dormant areas of his brain, straining his body but giving him extrasensory and pre-cognitive powers. To what purpose is this affliction/brain enhancement of Mulder's? Now he's the X-File, says Kritschgau. Since Kritschgau proclaims he still doesn't believe in aliens, it's hard to tell what he means by that, since the episode seems to posit that Mulder's illness and consequent powers are of alien origin. But we've already seen all of this in episodes past with the missing-in-action Gibson Praise, whose genetic pattern matched alien DNA and whose abnormally high brain activity gave him superpowerful ESP. Mulder became ill for one reason: to provide a sixth season finale cliffhanger. With all his family and professional problems, there are many reasons why Mulder might suffer a breakdown, but the writers have studiously avoided creating a truly organic source for such an occurrence. Mulder's illness is purely plot-driven and not particularly interesting, or even suspenseful. We know he'll come out of this just fine and be the same old Mulder again.

Diana Fowley shows up again, to confess to Mulder what he already knows, since he can read minds: she loves him. *Ah ha!* We knew it all along. She is this show's most soap-operatic creation so far. Diana Fowley, torn between handsome, sensitive and honorable Fox Mulder, and the creepy Cigarette Smoking Man, who offers her access and power. Who will win her heart? Tune in next week. And we will, since "The Sixth Extinction" is the second of a three-part arc.

"I'm dying, you idiot. If I could get up, I'd kick your ass."
—Mulder to the Cigarette Smoking Man

AMOR FATI ★★

11/14/99. Written by David Duchovny & Chris Carter. Directed by Michael Watkins. Editor: Heather MacDougall.

Scully's back in D.C., hovering over Mulder, until his mother checks him out of the hospital, although a videotape reveals the involvement of the Cigarette Smoking Man. Sure enough, the CSM has spirited Mulder away and, in a bizarre operation, has himself injected with "genetic material" from Mulder's brain, presumably so he'll be immune from the impending alien viral invasion. Thanks to an injection from the CSM, Mulder is experiencing a massive hallucination; he believes he is living a "typical" life: wife (in the person of Diana Fowley), kids, suburban house, Deep Throat and CSM as benevolent neighbors. He grows old, never noticing the alien apocalypse outside the window, until Scully (who in real life has been slipped a card key leading to Mulder's whereabouts and has come to rescue him) rouses him from his stupor to fight the invaders. Within Mulder's dream is another dream: he sees a little boy on a beach building a spaceship (much like the one Scully examined in the Ivory Coast) in the sand. At the end, he joins the boy in the ship's construction.

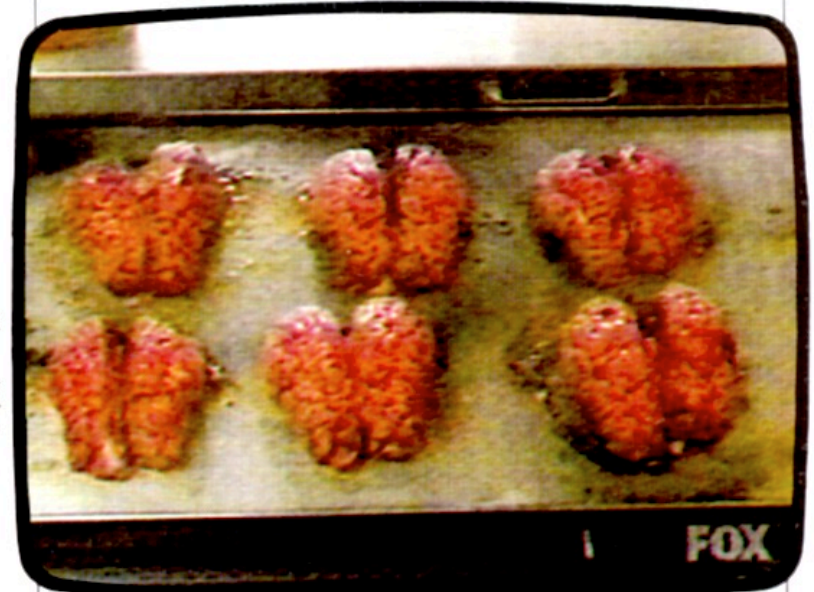
We've seen this before on THE X-FILES—

one partner lies comatose while the other runs around trying to find the cure, with occasional bedside visits. This time it's Mulder's turn to escape into a dreamlife, courtesy of a drug provided by the Cigarette Smoking Man. Mulder's dream is a deliberate rip-off of Martin Scorsese's THE LAST TEMPTATION OF CHRIST (adapted from the novel by Nikos Kazantzakis), with Mulder as Christ. Even worse, the episode clumsily drags the artificial linkage between Mulder and Christ into the real world, with a shot of an unconscious Mulder restrained on a cross-shape table in the CSM's medical lab, a metal "crown of thorns" encircling his head. Apparently, comparing Scully to the Virgin Mary in "Emily" wasn't enough; now it's Mulder's turn to be Jesus. The comparison is simply preposterous—nothing about Mulder's journey resembles that of Christ's, and Mulder isn't remotely Christ-like.

Mulder's dream-within-a-dream works much better: simple, spare, taking place on a beautiful beach with the peaceful ocean waves rolling in and out. The determined little boy building his spaceship of sand is a touching reminder to Mulder of a more innocent time and also of the willpower that has kept him going all these years.

Diana Fowley's role in "Amor Fati" proves once more that the writers have no idea what to do with her. She and Scully finally come together for what one would think would be a tremendous confrontation, but all they do is glare at each other, anti-climactically. And when Diana finally has a change of heart and betrays the CSM to save Mulder, her internal struggle takes place off-screen—as does her murder. Scully mentions her death to Mulder almost as an afterthought. What an insult to a character who has been poorly written to begin with, but nevertheless had a major part in recent mythology episodes.

With Diana Fowley dispatched with callous disregard, Scully and Mulder have one of the series' most on-the-nose and maudlin scenes ever: telling each other they're each other's touchstones. At least we are left with the beautiful image of Mulder and the little boy building the spaceship of sand; it may be washed away some day by the waves, disappearing like the Ivory Coast ship, but it's the effort to make it that counts.



Fried brains anyone?—mutant Rob Roberts' view of the product sizzling at Lucky Boy Burgers, a nicely satiric touch by scripter Vince Gilligan.

"I'm sorry, but this is like good cop, insane cop."
—Rob Roberts to Mulder and Scully

HUNGRY ★★

11/21/99. Written by Vince Gilligan. Directed by Kim Manners. Editor: Heather MacDougall.

"Squeeze" casts a long shadow. Six years after that seminal X-FILES episode, the monster (or mutant) of the week storyline has become one of the show's most familiar. It's also fallen into formula, serving up "Hungry" as a case in point. This time, the mutant is a young man named Rob Roberts (Chad E. Donella, FINAL

X-FILES

CHRIS CARTER

The man behind the mytharc on filming 7th season.

By Dan Persons

Where's the profit in knowing that the sinister and the strange daily walk our streets, when it seems that THE X-FILES—the show that poked at our paranoias, that visualized our national apprehensions, that defined cutting-edge horror for the better part of a decade—had finally reached the end of its own, recently tortured lifespan?

In the reality of television broadcasting, THE X-FILES had dodged the cancellation bullet one more time, finding itself renewed for an eighth season. In terms of the all holy mythos, though, fans had to wonder at what cost Chris Carter's brainchild had received its reprieve. Was this actually a new lease on life, or just a dwindling survival on life support, spurred by a network whose proprietors were all-too-aware of how they had botched the previous season? Could the creators and principals of the best genre show on television overcome internecine conflicts and hardening of the arteries to push this final season to heights not previously achieved, or would those tuning in be confronted with vague hints the show's prior glory?

Those were questions that avid viewers really wanted to know. You'd sooner get the correct time from the Cigarette Smoking Man.

Talking to Chris Carter, at the end of 1999 was a cordial, but cautious, experience. He could hardly be blamed—in what for him should have been a triumphant autumn, the executive producer had instead seen his carefully conceived worlds dismantled by strife and incompetence. The problems had actually started last summer, when X-FILES star David Duchovny filed suit against 20th Century-Fox, charging them with selling reruns of the show to the Fox-held FX network for much less than what the episodes would have brought in open syndication, thus cheating the actor out of his rightfully-earned share of the profits. While Carter was not named as a defendant—Duchovny is ballsy, not crazy—the executive producer was cited as



Creator and executive producer Chris Carter, tending to Fox's golden goose for a final eighth season next year.

an accomplice in the deal, willing to sell his profit-partners down the river in return for favorable treatment for his future shows.

If such was actually the case, then Carter should have checked the fine print a little more closely. On the decision of Fox Entertainment president Doug Herzog—a man who would be out the door scant months later—the network threw the bulk of its autumn '99 promotional might behind ACTION, a funny, edgy satire of current-day Hollywood that, it turned out, nobody on Earth wanted to watch. Forsaken in the push was HARSH REALM, Carter's new attempt to bring X-FILES-style darkness into the virtual reality world. The miscalculation was epic: by November, all of Fox's fall debuts had been cancelled, HARSH REALM included.

Carter did not mince words when asked if Fox had jumped the gun in cutting life-support on HARSH REALM: "Yes," was his terse reply. Asked about the emotional impact of the cancellation, he became more voluble: "There were a lot of people invested in it, a lot of my friends here, whom I

work with, a lot of people who had been giving a tremendous amount of attention and energy to it. For it to be so summarily and thoughtlessly cancelled really just hurt a lot of people. That is something you deal with in ways that no one but people on the inside would know."

If keeping some things within the production family was Carter's automatic response to tragedy, it was no surprise that he'd respond to questions about Duchovny's litigious revolt with similar caution: "I'm not going to talk about the lawsuit, because I've been asked not to. But along with the creative aspect of the job, there is a business aspect of the job. That was about business, and the business is about often-competing interests."

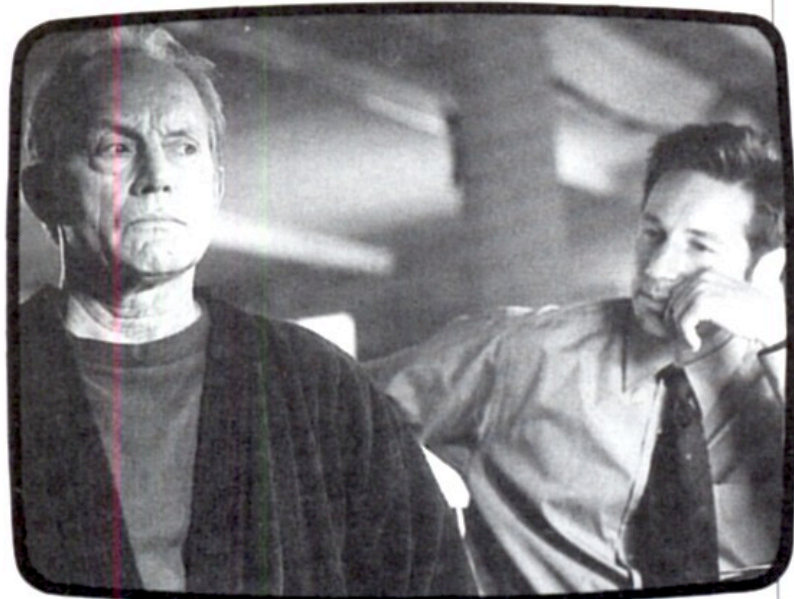
Was it easy, though, to set aside those interests when Carter had to face his recalcitrant star on the soundstage? "We have not had words, if that's what you mean."

Maybe not—whatever kind of diva Duchovny may turn out to be, no witnesses have stepped forward to claim that he ever brought his business problems to the set. Still, with "The Sixth Extinction," the season opener of THE X-FILES' seventh season, one had to wonder whether the actor wasn't paying some sort of on-screen price for his legal hubris. Picking up from "Biogenesis," the prior season's cliff-hanging final episode, "The Sixth Extinction," offered us a Mulder reduced to a comatose state, and maintained in that condition for the bulk of the hour. Looking close into Duchovny's glazed stare, one could imagine someone fairly high up the production ladder whispering in the actor's ear, "Is this the way you want to play out your final season?" The perplexities only doubled in the following week's "Amor Fati," a script credited to both Carter and Duchovny. In a scenario that recapitulated the finale of Martin Scorsese's THE LAST TEMPTATION OF CHRIST, we got a Mulder wishing for any path other than the one his life had taken, and an operating table crucifixion, complete with high-tech crown of thorns, that heaped on intimations of the agent's divine status, at least by his own

DESTINATION, in a strong performance), who disguises his true appearance (needle teeth, black animalistic eyes, hairless and earless head, dead-white skin) with wig, makeup, contacts and prosthetic teeth and ears. He wants to live a normal life, but the best of disguises can't eliminate an overwhelming urge to eat people's brains, which he sucks out of their skulls with a long, slender proboscis he keeps hidden in his mouth. Because David Duchovny and Gillian Anderson were finishing up work from summer projects when "Hungry" was filmed, Mulder and Scully appear infrequently. Mostly we see Mulder showing up, Columbo-like, to dig into Rob with supposedly innocent questions.

"Hungry" suffers from a syndrome that has afflicted a great many X-FILES episodes in recent seasons, but even more so here, because of Duchovny and Anderson's unavailability. This syndrome consists of the audience finding out early on who the guilty party is, what his (or her) problem is, and how he (or she) goes about accomplishing his (or her) nefarious deeds. There is no mystery to what's happening, and Mulder and Scully do little besides finding out what the audience already knows.

The saving grace of "Hungry" is its satiric tone. While sympathetic to Rob's struggles, writer Gilligan and director Manners cast a rather acerbic eye on his milieu: the tacky fast food emporiums (notice that nasty-looking Lucky Boy Burger statue) and cheap apartment buildings of Southern California's less affluent areas. A hallucinatory shot from Rob's perspective of frying burgers shaped like brains is sick but hilarious. Psychologists, here in the form of one Dr. Reinhart (Judith Hoag), also come in for some digs. Dr. Reinhart is a sympathetic therapist assigned by the insurance company of Rob's employer, Lucky Boy Burgers, to help employees cope with the trauma of a murder at their workplace (a murder committed by Rob). She's sooooo sweet-natured and sincere and anxious to help that she is more caricature than believable human being. So it's not entirely unexpected when she shows up at Rob's apartment (a no-no for a mental health professional) because she's worried about him. But then, where would this episode end if she hadn't? Mulder enters just as Rob is about to turn the good doctor into lunch, and when Rob, overwhelmed by guilt and self-loathing deliberately refuses to back down, Mulder shoots him. It's a sad moment, but the overall derivativeness of the plot keeps it from being the tragedy it should have been.



Mulder meets former FBI agent Frank Black (Lance Henriksen) in "Millennium," a crossover more fitting for Carter's doomed show than here.

"Nobody likes a math geek, Scully." —Mulder

MILLENNIUM

★ 1/2

11/28/99. Written by Vince Gilligan & Frank Spotnitz. Directed by Thomas J. Wright. Editor: Lynne Willingham.

If you couldn't guess by the title,

perception, in shovel-fuls. Daring, dramatic experiment, or Duchovny's calculatedly overdramatized retort to his tormentors? Only the authors knew for sure.

Said "Amor Fati" director Michael Watkins about Duchovny's on-screen vision of martyrdom, "I think David is such a fine writer and such a free mind. Chris has obviously proven that, and David—who did [season six's baseball-flashback] 'The Unnatural' and this—is so free, he's so gifted. For him to write this, he was totally there with the character. That's what it took and it was even more enlightening to have the writer be there right at the moment, so that we could really talk about where we were going, and the passion of these moments and these themes... And for poor David, lying on that table with that headgear on, it was extremely uncomfortable—his poor butt was cooking on the lights and [in that] head thing, he couldn't move. It was sort of ironic, because he wrote himself into this awful position.

We had a lot of smiles, though. I really like David and Gillian. I like them a lot."

While the season opener did add more fuel to the mythos fire—suggesting that aliens were in possession of technologies that could do everything from cure cancer to explain Adam Sandler's career—it was not immediately clear in what direction the balance of the season would go. "I actually thought this was going to be the year of Scully's science," admitted Carter. "That in doing that, there would be many spiritual concerns. Scully's dilemma is: how do you reconcile faith in God and faith in science? That's always an interesting question for the writers. I think we're dealing with that on some levels; we're actually telling six mythology episodes this season—in those we are dealing not just with Scully's faith, but with Mulder's faith as well. It has become somewhat spiritual, but I think what's more interesting is that we set out to do one thing and then found ourselves being more interested in something else."

Something else was right, although sometimes "anything else" might have been a more accurate description. The problem

“Last season, we didn't intend to make it lighter, it just wound up that way. A lot of people missed the old-time scary ones so we tried to make them scarier.”

—Co-Exec. Prod. Vince Gilligan—



Revisiting old friends: Scully gets reunited with Nick Chinlund as Donnie Pfaster in 7th season's "Orison."

scary ones, so we probably tried a little harder this season to make them scarier. Which is not to say we don't have the occasional lighter one, like 'The Amazing Maleeni.' But I think as a whole that we're not really heading it in any specific direction, other than to say we need to find out pretty soon whether or not this is our last season, and that will inform quite a bit."

Deprived of a clear-cut objective, THE X-FILES was free to try new directions in story-telling, but also evidenced one of the most telling signs of a show that had outlived its concept: creeping redundancy. "Chimera," about murder in a mini-Peyton Place, recapitulated the ambiance of last season's Mulder-goes-suburban "Arcadia," but without that episode's subversive tang.

The witty "The Amazing Maleeni," about a couple of conniving illusionists, not only failed to shake its ties to the classic "Humbug," but in an overall plot structure that had Mulder and Scully slowly becoming cognizant of their participation in a mechanism greater than could be immediately perceived, also seemed an earth-bound reworking of December's more su-

was, with one star pretty much admitting his full-bore animosity towards the show and his co-star not far behind in her contempt, with the executive producer potentially resenting being held in orbit around his only, bona-fide hit when, by all rights (and possibly without the network bungling), he should have already achieved escape velocity with newer, more challenging projects, no one seemed confident enough in THE X-FILES future to declare a clear-cut path for the season.

About the only thing that could be noted this year was a definitive move away from the more humorous tone the show had taken after its sixth season move to California, a season that hard-core fans derisively, and possibly unfairly, had dubbed, "X-FILES Lite." Observed co-executive producer Vince Gilligan, "Last season, we didn't have any conscious intention to make it lighter, it just sort of wound up that way. I think we heard a lot of people saying that they missed the old-time



Gillian Anderson turned auteur for "all things," writing and directing with a heavy hand that exhibited little talent and even less understanding of her role as Scully, with Nicholas Surovy.

pernatural "The Goldberg Variations."

Meanwhile, the strain marks continued to show, with at least seven of the episodes constructed to keep the bantering agents apart (and one, the killer tobacco "Brand X," even contriving to put Mulder into a coma again), and enough episodes set at least in part in California (including, curiously, Vince Gilligan, John Shibam and Frank Spotnitz's effective Appalachian-revenge thriller, "Theef") to make one wonder whether last season's production move wasn't finally taking its toll. Both stars have clearly taken more active control in the show's production, both to their benefit (Duchovny's self-scripted and directed "Hollywood A.D.") and their detriment (ibid. "Amor Fati," and Anderson's disastrous "all things," a self-conscious outing in which Scully, hitherto a devout Catholic, suddenly and inexplicably turns Buddhist). Whatever modifications—star-inflicted or otherwise—have occurred to THE X-FILES characters (and what the hell happened to Mulder's fondness for skin rags, anyway?), Carter claimed that such changes could only be expected over the span of seven years. "I think Mulder is still a willing participant in any adventure that cannot be explained; he still takes the unpopular side; he still puts it in the face of his superiors. If anything, though, he has worked with a partner who has seen so much that he's not able to get as big a rise out of her as he once did. I think he may seem to be less of the 'Spooky Mulder' that she came to know early on. But the aspect of Mulder's character is still the same in that he wants to believe he is looking for phenomena that cannot be explained and that might expand his perception of reality."

As for Scully's ability to remain the skeptic after having been exposed to weekly helpings of aliens, poltergeists, and giant mutated fluke-men, Carter said, "Scully's a scientist, so she comes to everything scientifically. Even though she sees something that she can't explain, she thinks it can ultimately be explained. That's her M.O. and her bias. So while she has seen a lot, she is never going to take anything at face value and say, 'That is paranormal.' She will always look for a rational and scientific explanation."

The season was far from a total wash. Gilligan was responsible for two engaging envelope-pushers—the monster P.O.V. experiment "Hungry" and the reality-TV satire "X-Cops"—and the darkly vivid Monster-of-the-Week "Theef." The mythos two-parter "Sein Und Zeit" and "Closure" took the questionable tactic of trying to explain the JonBenet Ramsey killing in supernatural terms, but also provided an emotionally engaging conclusion to Mulder's search for his sister Samantha (while, in fine X-FILES tradition, raising three new questions for every one that it answered). And the cleverly titled, William B. Davis scripted "En Ami" dared to give us a glimpse at the Cigarette Smoking Man's humanity, while still keeping his motivations shrouded in clouds of Marlboro smoke. Admitted Carter, "This show is so elastic that it succeeds on so many levels. I think that there is no one episode that is a crystallization of what the show does best, because it always is surprising, even to me, how many things it does well. The fact that we can actually make fun of ourselves and everyone seems to have fun doing it and fun watching it, I think, says a lot about the show, too. It is protean."

However mutable the series might have been, though, it could not accommodate all

"Millennium" is the inevitable X-FILES/MILLENNIUM crossover episode. The teaser is promising enough: a man hides out in a funeral home after the wake, opens the coffin, exchanges clothes with the corpse and then presses a switched-on cell phone into its hand. The mysterious man next shows up at the cemetery after the burial, his cell phone at the ready. Sure enough, it rings, and he heads out towards the grave, shovel in hand. The intrigue continues into the first act, when Mulder and Scully meet with Skinner and several other agents to discuss the grave robbery. It turns out that the deceased, a former FBI agent, was one of four retired FBI agents who had all shot themselves and then had their graves desecrated. All four had also joined a law enforcement consulting agency called The Millennium Group. Mulder seeks the help of Frank Black (Lance Henriksen) now in voluntary commitment at a psychiatric hospital. He is trying to get his life back together in order to regain custody of his daughter, Jordan (Brittany Tiplady). Desperate to avoid any action that would keep him from Jordan, Frank refuses to assist Mulder and Scully—but he also slips Mulder a clue that puts the two agents on the trail of the mysterious clothes-switching, grave-desecrating man.

Unfortunately, after this episode's initial scenes, everything slides downhill rapidly, with a storyline that crosses the border into ludicrous. Henriksen plays him with such indifference that it's hard to care about anything Black does. Frank and The Millennium Group aren't even necessary to the story; this episode could have been about any group of eschatologically-obsessed people—but this storyline really belongs on an episode of MILLENNIUM and not on THE X-FILES.



One of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse? No, it's a shambling zombie straight out of George Romero's NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD.

According to the mystery man, who turns out to be a true believer in the coming Apocalypse named Mark Johnson (Holmes Osborne), the four former FBI agents felt the only way to bring on the dire events of the Millennium was to kill themselves, after which they would be brought back to life as the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. This is an odd notion, to be sure, but nonetheless, they do come back to life. But do we get four terrifying horsemen? No, we get zombies. That's right, shambling, homicidal zombies who have nothing better to do until the advent of the Apocalypse than bury themselves in the dirt floor of Johnson's basement (except when they're killing people). The only way to stop them is a bullet through the brain; has someone at Ten Thirteen been watching NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD?

To cap off an otherwise lackluster episode, Mulder and Scully finally do the wild thing—for these two, that's a kiss on the lips. The time is New Year's, Mulder and Scully are relieved they have escaped yet another near brush with death, and there's this sprig of mistletoe hanging above them...According to interviews with Chris Carter, a fan had written to complain about all the near

and false kisses on the show (and in the movie), and Carter decided the fan had a legitimate beef. Mulder says after the big moment, "The world didn't end." It didn't shake, rattle, or roll either. This kiss seems stuck on to the episode by a tack in its complete irrelevance to the storyline or Mulder and Scully in general. Carter seems to be saying, "There, you asked for it, you saw it, can we now forget it?" Still, in its complete absence of passion, that kiss sums up "Millennium" quite nicely.

"I'll show you my theory if you show me yours."

—Mulder to Scully

RUSH

★★

12/5/99. Written by David Amann. Directed by Robert Lieberman. Editor: Heather MacDougall.

A bland story about some bland teens who discover a cave that possesses a magical property that gives them the power to manipulate time: i.e., they can move so quickly that to others they seem to move not at all. Thus, when one teen wants to torment his teacher, he seemingly stands still while the teacher is slammed around the cafeteria. Think of *THE FLASH* mixed with the *STAR TREK* episode "Wink of an Eye." The twist here is that the teens must return periodically to the cave to renew their power, and that the time-shifting has an addictive, severely detrimental physiological effect: the power in the cave also acts like a drug, giving them the titular rush, while simultaneously wearing down their bodies. One boy in particular, Max (Scott Cooper), falls under the time-shift effect's thrall, to the point where he feels invincible and kills a police officer to keep his secret. The cause of death is so peculiar, however—among other things, a blow to the officer's face was so violent it literally pushed his glasses to the back of his head—that Mulder decides to investigate, with Scully in tow. Mulder's first guess—poltergeists—is off-base, but various pieces of evidence, including a surveillance tape analyzed by Mulder's scientist-of-all-trades pal Chuck Burks (Bill Dow), and hospital records and tests lead Mulder to the facts. The pressure of the investigation forces the arguing kids back once more to the cave, where a girl named Chastity (Nicki Aycox), who is also addicted to the power of speed (geddit?), shoots the out-of-control Max, and then, with her super-quick powers, commits suicide by stepping directly in the bullet as it exits Max. The special effect of Chastity stepping in front of the slow-motion bullet, is a neat one, although nowhere near as spectacular as similar shots in *THE MATRIX*; it's more on the level of the many TV commercials these days that use the same photographic tricks. Although "Rush" would like to be an insightful comment on teen angst, resentment of and the thrill of defying authority, as well as the thrill and degradation of addiction, it

Scully and Mulder investigate murders linked to perpetrators moving faster than the eye can see: think *FLASH* and *Trek's* "Wink of An Eye."



situations, especially when the decision to move ahead on an eighth season was delayed until the very end of season seven. "We're still waiting to hear," Gilligan said in January. "[20th Century-Fox Television and Fox Broadcasting topper] Sandy Grushow said that he thought it was a 50/50 chance at this point. I don't know what the exact odds are, but I do know for sure it is up in the air still and we are waiting for a final verdict from David Duchovny and Chris Carter.

"We need to find out pretty soon whether or not this is our last season, and that will inform quite a bit. If it is our last season, we just need to know so that we can end the show properly with a great two-part episode or a three-part[er] or something like that. If it's not our last season, I guess we're just...we don't really have...Chris Carter and [executive producer] Frank Spotnitz may have more of a master plan, but I think generally if this is not our last season we're all basically doing what we always do, which is trying to come up with a good mix of mostly scary and some suspenseful and some lighter episodes, and just keep entertaining our audience.

"You know, it's a shame: with the original *STAR TREK*, they didn't know they had been cancelled—I guess they had been cancelled during their hiatus, and they didn't get a chance to do a final episode, which I guess everybody would have appreciated. I don't think anyone's going to let that happen here. If *X-FILES* ends, I can't imagine it would be because we were cancelled. It would only be because David Duchovny and Chris Carter and Gillian Anderson decided it was time to move on to other things."

Of course, any vote that incorporated Duchovny's voice was easy to prognosticate. By April, the actor was talking openly with *Entertainment Weekly* about how his "Hollywood A.D." episode would be "my way of saying goodbye," and speculating on what his life would have been like if *THE X-FILES* had backed off the Mulder/Scully interplay and become more an ensemble show (Here's a hint: "Hi, I'm David Duchovny for 10-10-321..." Jeez, hasn't the man ever seen *THE*

“The show succeeds on many levels. There is no one episode that is a crystalization of what the show does best...It's surprising how many things it does well.”

—Exec. Prod. Chris Carter—



Krista Allen as Jade Blue Afterglow in "First Person Shooter," a *HARSH REALM* virtual reality leftover, helmed by Carter.

er than that, I don't really have a great answer for you."

Carter again minced no words when asked about his intentions to participate in the next *X-FILES* movie: "That's my plan." As for moving with the show into season eight, his public stance was initially one of guarded optimism: "I would only do it if I felt that everyone wanted to do it, because I felt that there were plenty of good stories to tell. If everyone felt that they were up to it, I would be excited to continue. I think that anything past year five is difficult for a series, but it's also where, if you can work in a collaborative and creative way, I think you can find things that you didn't know were there. I think we're at that place, we can continue to be. The other reason would be that there are very few, great television ideas, and something like *THE X-FILES* has the ability to generate so many different kinds of stories that you cannot close the door on it just because you can. The show becomes bigger than its parts. If there were more good stories to tell, I think, in a way, it's only doing justice to continue on."

But it seemed that, after making that

OTHERS?).

Taking no chances, Fox gave Chris Carter the go-ahead to spin *THE LONE GUNMEN*—the conspiracy theorists and cyber-geek poster-boys who were rarely seen this season—off into their own series, the pilot being hastily assembled and shot in early spring in Vancouver.

As far as what path an *X-FILES* eighth season might take, no one dared speculate. "It's a question we're always asking ourselves," admitted Gilligan, who has a contractual commitment with Fox for at least the next season, and who claimed he would be happy to continue on with the show.

"Everyone knows that [Scully and Mulder] have a tremendous respect for one another, certainly a platonic love for one another and they would each lay down their lives for the other. I think that's the way we like it, that's the way a lot of the fans like it as well. That could probably blossom into some sort of romantic relationship, but I think we're also reluctant to push it to that level. Other

doesn't really say anything we haven't seen in dozens of teen-oriented shows or even past X-FILES episodes, such as "Miracle Man," "D.P.O." or "Die Hand Die Verletzt," which all dealt with inter-generational conflict (among other things) and featured memorable actors playing young people with strong, specific personalities. Here our three teen characters, played by actors far too old to pass as teens, are as generic as can be, their individual situations are equally generic (Max's dad is, of course, the town sheriff, Tony's mom wants a better life for her son), and there is little the actors can do to bring these kids alive. "Rush" is hardly the worst of THE X-FILES; it's merely forgettable.

"So basically we're looking for Wile E. Coyote."

—Scully

THE GOLDBERG VARIATION ★★★

12/12/99. Written by Jeffrey Bell. Directed by Thomas J. Wright. Editor: Lynne Willingham.

A charmer of an episode, "The Goldberg Variation" introduces us to one Harry Weems (Willie Garson), an inconsequential little man who seems to be enjoying an extraordinarily consequential run of luck. He not only wins a huge pile of cash playing poker with mobsters, but he survives a push by the resentful gangsters off the roof of the building where the card game was held. The latter event comes to Mulder's attention thanks to a report from an FBI agent staking out the building. Mulder theorizes that Harry may have a genetic predisposition towards rapid tissue regeneration, but before long he decides Harry isn't a genetic mutant, merely the recipient of a lot of good luck.

The good luck premise is lifted bodily from a failed Fox series, *STRANGE LUCK*, but writer Bell and director Wright put their own delightfully quirky spin on it. It's such a pleasure to see an episode which features a good guy instead of a villain as the leading guest character. And Harry is very good; like Chaplin's Little Tramp in *CITY LIGHTS*, who devotes all his time to raising \$1,000 to pay for a cure for his beloved Flower Girl's blindness, Harry does everything he can to get the \$100,000 needed to pay for treatment of a neighbor boy's failing liver. What keeps Weems from falling into sentimentality is his irascibility, stubbornness and insistence on doing things his way. In 30 years, he could turn out to be another Arthur Dales (take your pick as to which one). Willie Garvin does a terrific job of making Harry irritating and loveable at the same time.

Mulder and Scully find in Henry's apartment, a wonderfully whimsical Rube Goldberg-like contraption from which the episode takes its central conceit: everything has a cause and effect. Henry's luck is the result of a series of events that are as Rube Goldberg-like in the way they play out as Henry's devices. The episode takes a number of unexpected paths and the last big

Nick Chinlund returns as Donnie Pfaster, the death fetishist of second season's "Irresistible," miraculously striding out of prison in "Orison."



Mulder in "The Goldberg Variation," framed by the legs of a thug hanging from a ceiling fan by his shoelace, a charming treatise on good luck.

surprise seems to be not coincidence, but fate working itself out to find a gratifying solution to everyone's problems.

"You need a buff and polish. I'll do it for free. I'll even do your cuticles."

—Donnie Pfaster

ORISON ★

1/9/00. Written by Chip Johannessen. Directed by Rob Bowman. Editor: Heather MacDougall.

Yet another episode about religious faith and belief, weakly tied into the return of Donnie Pfaster (Nick Chinlund), the "death fetishist" of second season's "Irresistible." There must have been a big pile of leftover MILLENNIUM scripts. Pfaster escapes from prison, thanks to the unexpected and miraculous intervention of an ex-con preacher named Orison (Scott Wilson, *THE NINTH CONFIGURATION*). Orison hypnotizes, en masse, the entire population of inmates and guards of the state prison where Pfaster is incarcerated. When Pfaster realizes everyone is in a stupor, he takes advantage of the situation and makes his break. Orison's motivation is that Pfaster must be sprung so he, Orison, may personally render the death sentence Pfaster escaped. Mulder and Scully are then called in to track Pfaster down, and Scully must deal, in her usual repressed way, with the memories of her nearly fatal encounter with Pfaster in "Irresistible."

Everything concerning Pfaster in this episode is a retread of "Irresistible": he does his usual thing with prostitutes, fussing over one call girl's grooming and bathing habits, but this time his actions seem rote, rather than genuine expressions of an obsession. Director Rob Bowman does his best to instill an atmosphere of dread, but everything is so by the numbers that Pfaster's fetishes seem more amusing than scary. Pfaster even does the morphing-face thing again, this time into a demon, scaring the wits out of Orison. But suggesting Pfaster may literally have a demon in him serves to weaken the character further. Pfaster was so horrifying because he exemplified so purely the dark side of real human behavior. As for Orison, he definitely seems to have wandered in from a MILLENNIUM episode.

"Orison" wants to be another exploration of faith for Scully, who ends up in the grotesque, demeaning position, being bound and gagged by Pfaster. Scully escapes from her bonds and shoots Pfaster dead, a cold-blooded act of murder, not self-defense. Law enforcement officers break the laws they've sworn to uphold all the time; victims attack their abusers all the time. Even though there is virtually nothing in the episode to indicate that Scully is on the verge of losing her self-control, we are now given a situation where Scully, a federal agent who takes her duties with the greatest seriousness, has committed an act that she will find reprehensible on every level once she regains control of herself. It doesn't matter that Pfaster is total scum? She knows she killed him

when he was cornered and unresisting. So how is this tremendous aberration of character handled? The answer: it's not handled at all. Scully looks a bit sad afterwards and wonders to Mulder who was "in work in me, or what made me pull the trigger?" Mulder asks, "What if it were God?" and Scully counters, "What if it weren't?" You can make of this what you will, but the line is flimsy; it doesn't work as even the beginning of self-analysis; it's a weak tie-in to the religious aspects of the episode, and the idea that the devil may be working through Scully divests her of responsibility for what she did, just as a similar suggestion robs Pfaster of his true horror.

But evasion of responsibility seems to be the main idea at work at the end of "Orison." Mulder has told Scully he will write his report to say she didn't have any other choice but to shoot Pfaster; i.e., he's going to cover it up, and that means the FBI will cover it up, and no one will ever care that Scully murdered Pfaster, because everyone thinks he got what he deserved. Even if you buy the notion that Mulder and Scully are willing to participate in such a cover-up—a notion that a few seasons ago would have been impossible to contemplate—Scully, at least until this episode, was the kind of person who would be tormented by the fact that she killed a man no longer a threat to her. There are consequences to an act like this, and even if Mulder and Scully duck the professional consequences, the personal and emotional ones cannot be avoided, not if this show wants to maintain any relationship to reality and the character of Scully as she has been established over the years.

"Orison" might have been the beginning of an entire arc of episodes showing Mulder and Scully dealing with the death of Pfaster, which could then have branched off into an exploration of all sorts of issues concerning their work in the X-Files, but...no. It's back to the status quo and the reset button next week. The real x-file in "Orison" is why Ten Thirteen comes up with stories like this and then refuses to follow through on them.



Ricky Jay as cut-rate magician Herman Pinchbeck, faking his own death by decapitation to scam the FBI in "The Amazing Maleeni."

"God knows magic barely pays."

—The Amazing Maleeni

THE AMAZING MALEENI ★★

1/16/00. Written by Vince Gilligan, John Shibban, Frank Spotnitz. Directed by Thomas J. Wright. Editor: Lynne Willingham.

You can't help but think of what Darin Morgan would do with a storyline about magicians. Instead, we get a rather pedestrian hour whose credibility depends on how convincing you find the scheme concocted by cut-rate magician Herman Pinchbeck, a.k.a. The Amazing Maleeni (Ricky Jay), and his cohort in crime, Billy LaBonge (Jonathan Levit), to steal money from a bank via fraudulent electronic transfers. Supposedly, such a transfer requires the badge number of a federal agent, so Pinchbeck and



LaBonge dream up a crime they figure will attract the Feds, in the form of Mulder and Scully. Maleeni and LaBonge lead the two agents by their noses into a maze of deception and double-crosses, all so they can frame a small-time hood LaBonge hates, while also stealing the I.D. number off Mulder's badge and making off with the electronic cash.

This plotline is a bit like the recent film *ARLINGTON ROAD*, where radical right-wing conspirators put an extremely elaborate scheme into motion which they hope will dupe FBI agent Jeff Bridges into bringing a bomb into FBI headquarters. The scheme is fun to watch while it unfolds, but in the end, it's not credible; too much is left open to chance for it really to happen. "The Amazing Maleeni" has the same problem, along with one other: LaBonge tells Mulder and Scully that magic is about misdirection, so we're signaled early on that everything we see is a deception of some sort and we just sit back and wait for the next revelation. Plus, we see LaBonge framing the thuggish Cissy Alvarez (Robert LaSardo) as the perpetrator of a decoy robbery, so again we know that something's afoot. This is rather like a magician committing the ultimate no-no: revealing the technique behind his tricks. The ending is a let-down as well as unbelievable: why in the world would Pinchbeck need an FBI agent's ID number and thumbprint to make a transfer rather than the bank manager's password? Maleeni and LaBonge's daring scheme is built on a twist that does not pass muster.

The casting is impeccable. Ricky Jay, one of the best magicians around, is perfect as the dour Pinchbeck/Maleeni, deadpan enough to make even Buster Keaton happy. His few feats of magic are fun to watch. It's a pity that Maleeni's special trick—turning his head around 360 degrees—is achieved by a very obvious and cheesy computer effect. Jonathan Levit, who also demonstrates his skill with magic, is excellent as the wiseacre trickster LaBonge.

Unfortunately, the episode ends on a troubling note. Cissy has been framed as a bank robber. Mulder and Scully know he's innocent. Cissy is a lowlife criminal and he made LaBonge's life hell when they were in prison together, but he's innocent of the particular crime of which he's accused. Do Mulder and Scully end the episode talking about how to get him out of jail? No, they do not. That's a loose end that should have been tied up, if only with a line of dialogue.

"I'm just saying that somebody offering you all the answers can be a very powerful thing."

—Mulder

SIGNS AND WONDERS ★★

1/23/00. Written by Jeff Bell. Directed by Kim Manners. Editor: Louise A. Innes.

Another script left over from *MILLENNIUM*?

Michael Childers as Reverend O'Connor, a fundamentalist who engages in snake handling as an act of faith in "Signs and Wonders."



Scully cowers before a caged snake in "Signs and Wonders," a script by Jeff Bell that plays like a leftover from the cancelled *MILLENNIUM*.

In Blessing, Tennessee, Mulder and Scully become embroiled in the conflict between a liberal minister, Reverend Samuel Mackey (Randy Oglesby) and a fundamentalist preacher, Enoch O'Connor (Michael Childers), who exhorts his flock to engage in snake-handling as a test of faith. When a mass of snakes kills the boyfriend of O'Connor's pregnant daughter Gracie (Tracy Middendorf), Mulder believes, according to the evidence at the crime scene, that there is more to the young man's death than meets the eye. His belief is reinforced when the snake attacks continue. He thinks the creatures are being directed to murder by some powerful and evil force.

Although "Signs and Wonders" purports to be an examination of different modes of faith, it offers a pessimistic—and distorted view of religion. The two churches are at the extremes of worship style. At one end is the fundamentalist church of joyful true believers, whose minister preaches that the only test of faith is putting oneself into mortal danger. Its rival is a church of liberal theology and good intentions, which is also stultifyingly dull and lacking in spirit. Of course, the latter church, whose members are complacent and doubt the Devil's literal existence, is the one where the Evil One sneaks in: Mackey actually is a demon with a snake in his throat (there's a Freudian image for you, and one that recurs on *X-FILES*, in episodes such as "Fire" and this season's "Hungry"). "Signs and Wonders" thus seems to be saying that the religious paranoia of an O'Connor is the only way to combat the devil. But there has to be a better solution than those offered by either of these churches, both of which come off, in their individual and very different ways, to be the last places anyone would want to worship; one's fanatical, the other is devoid of energy. "Signs and Wonders" offers no alternatives to either extreme. And Mulder and Scully, too, are powerless to stop Mackey, who escapes to take up a new post in another church at the episode's end. There is some fairly witty dialogue as Mulder and Scully debate the meaning of faith while they investigate the case, but it's all been heard so many times before. And their own individual tests of faith (both are subjected to snakes, Scully at O'Connor's church, and Mulder through Mackey's supernatural powers), go nowhere.

To its credit, "Signs and Wonders" tries to overturn stereotypes by showing that Mulder and Scully are wrong about O'Connor (they assume he is the father of his daughter's baby) and by making the "good" preacher the villain. But Randy Oglesby is so smarmy and self-satisfied as Mackey, that right away we know he is not to be trusted, and the episode thus undercuts its attempts to turn assumptions on their heads.

In fact, the episode's greatest fault is its cardboard characters, including the too-sincere Mackey. The liveliest performer—apart from Michael Childers, who gives an enthusiastic, committed performance as O'Connor—is the Minnie Pearl hairdo of Beth Grant as kindly Iris

Finster, one of Reverend Mackey's flock. There is also the matter of Gracie giving birth to snakes—a scene that is extremely disturbing, to say the least, especially with the special effect of snakes rippling under the skin of Gracie's pregnant stomach. Disturbing is good; it's been a while since there's been anything truly disturbing on this show.

"I don't know what is the truth and what isn't anymore."

—Mulder

SEIN UND ZEIT ★★

2/6/00. Written by Chris Carter & Frank Spotnitz. Directed by Michael Watkins. Editor: Heather MacDougall.

There are some powerful and touching moments in "Sein und Zeit," but others that miss the mark so widely that it hurts to think what this episode might have been. Mulder investigates the kidnapping of cute little Amber LaPierre, and of course Mulder (and everyone else) knows this is the kind of case Mulder takes personally. But when he begins to think Amber's case may be related to Samantha's abduction, the parallels between "Sein und Zeit" and "Paper Hearts" become all too obvious. But unlike the concentrated, intense "Paper Hearts," "Sein und Zeit" wanders over too much territory, as Mulder not only has to deal with the case at hand and his deep emotional responses to it, but to yet another tragic turn in his life, the suicide of his mother. The relationship between Mulder and his mother could easily have made for a two-parter all by itself, even without a suicide—let alone another child kidnapping.



Children turn up missing, with echoes of JonBenet Ramsey in "Sein und Zeit," revealed to be starlight children saved from suffering.

A major piece of evidence in Amber's case is a ransom note, which the police believe was written by Mrs. LaPierre (Shareen Mitchell) although she doesn't remember writing it and claims to have no knowledge of what happened to her daughter, a shameless exploitation of a real-life tragedy, the JonBenet Ramsey murder, which included a ransom note some believe written by Mrs. Ramsey. And if the ransom note weren't enough, later in the episode we meet the killer, a man who likes to dress as Santa Claus. No doubt he was based on Ramsey family friend who also liked to dress as Santa Claus. The LaPierre note leads Mulder to Kathy Lee Tencate (Kim Darby), a mother convicted of killing her son based on the evidence of a similar note. Kathy Lee tells Mulder that "walk-ins," whom she describes as beings who live in the starlight, took her son and Samantha to protect them from the harm they would have suffered in life. Despite the events of second season's "Red Museum," which also featured walk-ins, Mulder seems strangely unfamiliar with the term. This two-parter's use of "walk-ins" is equally confused. Kathy Lee also describes them as "old souls looking for new homes," but these walk-ins don't inhabit bodies,



"So who's going to be on the show next year?" the usual suspects seemingly debate in season-ender "Requiem." With Scully and Mulder side-lined, perhaps we'll be reduced to watching Skinner do paperwork.

statement, the exec producer took a more careful inventory of the stories remaining to be told and decided that justice had well been served. Come April, both Carter and Spotnitz had signed up with Miramax genre branch Dimension Films to respectively direct and produce/write *SERIOS*, a "true" story about a man able to project his thoughts onto

film negative. Why this change of heart? "I have a contract [with Fox] that lasts through the end of this year," Carter had said in 1999, prior to cutting the deal. "If I didn't re-up, I probably wouldn't be giving any attention to the show, but if I do re-up, I will be giving the same amount of attention to the show that I've always given to it, because I don't want it to be anything other than what it could potentially be." In light of ensuing events, it well appeared that Carter had made his own decision about his continuing involvement in the future of *THE X-FILES*.

As with all things *X-FILES*, Carter now faces a daunting puzzle: how to devote time and attention to a major, feature-film project while "giving the same amount of attention" to the show that placed his name on the media map.

Meanwhile, for the public's sake, it was all smiles from the series' principals as the show received the eighth season go-ahead. Duchovny, who just prior to the renewal was seen looking bored on the all-star edition of *WHO WANTS TO BE A MILLIONAIRE* (and who wound up taking home less money for his agonies than either Rosie O'Donnell or Ray Romano), told the press, "I am pleased we were able to come to an agree-

"I would only do [the show] if everyone wanted to, because there are plenty of good stories to tell. If everyone was up to it, I would be excited to continue."

—Exec. Prod. Chris Carter—

ment that enables me to remain part of *THE X-FILES*...I'm looking forward to going back to work." Getting a salary raise to a reported \$350,000-\$400,000, and having his suit settled out of court no doubt helped.

But one had to wonder exactly how much Duchovny relished a return to the world of the sinister and the weird when a part of his agree-

ment dictated a lighter workload in the upcoming season. The result of that handy codicil: No one should expect Mulder's prompt return from the alien-fueled joy-ride that scooped him up at the end of "Requiem," the seventh season closer.

With Mulder M.I.A. (probably to some beach in the south of France), Scully in a family way (having apparently been knocked up while doing the stop-motion Macarena in an Oregon forest—did Anderson ask for some off-time as well?), and the Cigarette Smoking Man apparently passed on (though you can never keep a good creep down), it's anybody's guess who will be fit enough to pick up the story come fall. Skinner? C'mon, do you really want to watch sixty minutes of paperwork? Krycek? An interesting alternative—his reformation is being hinted at, but *ibid.* the parenthetical for CSM.

The Lone Gunmen? Oops, sorry, they've got their own show to worry about. No, *THE X-FILES* world is now filled with people who, through either contractual or other obligations, are too preoccupied to carry on the work started seven years ago. It's an ironic counterpoint to the questions posed at the beginning: the truth may still be out there, but there may be no one left to discover it. □

they remove souls and transform the bodies into energy.

And one must wonder at the benevolence of supernatural beings who compel mothers to write notes that, in Kathy Lee's case, results in her conviction for murdering her son, and in Mrs. LaPierre's case, puts her under suspicion of kidnapping her daughter. Mulder becomes convinced both mothers are innocent—but at the same time, he must deal with his own mother, because Mrs. Mulder has committed suicide. An autopsy reveals Mrs. Mulder was suffering from cancer, but Mulder suddenly convinces himself that she must have written a note like Mrs. LaPierre and Mrs. Tencate and that when she called him earlier in the episode she was trying to warn him about Samantha being taken by the walk-ins, but she was murdered before she could do so. Convenient psychic clues provided by a vision of Amber to her parents lead Mulder and Scully to quickly catch the Santa Claus killer, but (as we will learn in "Closure") Amber is not one of his victims; her mystery is ended along with Samantha's in that episode. So the Santa Claus is really a herring in a red Santa suit.

There is a lot of good acting in "Sein und Zeit," primarily from Duchovny, who, no matter how many times he has to play Mulder's agony over Samantha, always hits the right note. The scenes where Mulder grieves over his mother—particularly when he lays his head on his answering machine to listen to his mother's voice on the tape—are truly affecting. He is matched by the superb Kim Darby (*TRUE GRIT*, the "Miri" episode of *STAR TREK*) as the plain, but luminous Kathy Lee Tencate, who despite her years in jail, is happy believing her son is in a better place. But to kill off Mulder's mother so suddenly smacks of plot device (and "Closure" proves it). Mrs. Mulder has always been a sketchily written character; the show never quite did her justice, and to kill her off so summarily is unfair both to her and to Mulder.

"I guess I just want it to be over."

—Mulder

CLOSURE

★ 1/2

2/13/00. Written by Chris Carter & Frank Spotnitz. Directed by Kim Manners. Editor: Lynne Willingham.

"End of the road," says Mulder in "Closure." Translation: "Closure" is the end of Mulder's search for Samantha, unless Chris Carter decides he has to pull the Samantha-rabbit out of the hat one more time. But he probably won't; "Closure" has an air of finality about it. Sadly, instead of getting the grand, breath-taking, heart-breaking finale that should be the climax of Mulder's search for Samantha, the story expires limply with some nonsense about Samantha being one of the starlight children. It's as if Peter Pan had jumped through Mulder's window and announced that Sam had been in Never Never Land the whole

Mulder gets a hug from Samantha in "Closure," as if Peter Pan jumped through his window to say Sam had been in Never Never Land all along.



time. Only Duchovny's sincerity keeps the reunion scene from floating away altogether. Perhaps there's no way to provide a genuinely satisfactory end to the quest for Samantha; how could anything we see on screen top whatever has been in our imagination for seven years? Perhaps this is a story that shouldn't have an ending at all; certainly that would be preferable to the fuzziness that we get here.

In "Closure," a police psychic named Harold Piller (Anthony Heald) offers to help Mulder with the Amber LaPierre case. Piller admits he is also searching for his kidnapped son, and he knows Mulder is also in search of someone. Piller claims that Amber, Kathy Tencate's son and his son were all taken by "walk-ins"—beings of starlight who transform children into pure energy before terrible things can happen to them. Mulder's mother then appears as a ghost and Mulder, like Kathy Tencate and Mrs. LaPierre, unconsciously writes down a clue: "April Base," the name of a nearby deserted military base, where he learns Samantha had been raised with the Spender family, including Jeffrey Spender. They find Samantha's diary, which leads them to a nurse who had had contact with a runaway Samantha, and at the nurse's home the ghost of Piller's little boy leads Mulder to Samantha herself, now one of the starlight beings, at play in a lovely field with other children rescued by the walk-ins.

Thus, Mulder's reunion with Samantha comes not through any real detective work or a climactic confrontation with the CSM, but through a lot of coincidence and psychic clues, the worst of the latter being the clue communicated to him in writing through the ghost of his mother. Poor Mrs. Mulder; we see now that her suicide was merely the most cynical of plot devices; she's dead so she can pass a clue to Mulder. Of course, this clue is nothing like the other psychic writing clues—i.e., the long notes the starlight beings had the mothers of the two about-to-be-kidnapped children write, with the strange line about "Nobody shoots at Santa Claus." Presumably Mrs. Mulder is a run-of-the-mill ghost, not a walk-in; and she is far more succinct, passing along just two words. Of course, Santa Claus has been caught already; most of "Sein und Zeit" appears irrelevant to the events of "Closure," apart from Mrs. Mulder's suicide, serving only to introduce the idea of the walk-ins.

More psychic information is provided by Piller's little son, now one of the starlight beings. Piller doesn't see him, just Mulder, which one can interpret to mean that Mulder is now at an emotional place where he is ready to find Samantha and end his quest, whereas Harold is not. However, since there was absolutely nothing in previous episodes (including "Sein und Zeit") leading up to this enormous emotional transformation of Mulder's (this is the kind of story that calls for a season-long arc!), it's far too much to swallow that Mulder is suddenly ready, simply because he read Samantha's diary back at April Base, for this unquestioning acceptance of



The ghost of Mulder's mother (Rebecca Toolan) whispers in his ear in "Closure," at last solving the mystery of his abducted sister Samantha.

what is, after all, a dream or a vision. In fact, visions have become the easy substitute for crafting genuine character development this season.

Harold Piller is one of those Mulder-doppelganger characters who pop up from time to time on X-FILES, and Anthony Heald gives an excellent portrayal of Piller's desperation and panic as he searches for his lost son. We see in the pathetic Harold the possibility of a future Mulder, if Mulder does not get his own life together. But Mulder apparently does get his life together at the end, telling Scully he's at peace, one of the most astonishing things he's ever said. How can he possibly be at peace, knowing now the true horror of what Samantha endured from ages 8 to 14? And then there's his miserable family life after Samantha's disappearance, the murder of his father, the very recent suicide of his mother, everything else he and Scully have endured, the continued existence of the CSM and his henchmen, and, oh yes, the impending alien viral invasion.

And, of course, the end of his quest, which had fueled his very existence for so many years. This is a Mulder who should be entering a deep, dark depression as he faces a life without the motor that has driven it for so long. But no, Mulder will be his old self in the next episode and through the rest of the season. It's as if he never found Samantha.

"Closure" represents the triumph of irrationalism over rationalism in THE X-FILES. The Mulder who told Scully in the pilot episode that he wanted proof too has disappeared. The classic X-FILES dialogue of faith versus reason shrank to microscopic proportions a long time ago, but occasionally it would reappear, since a pro-forma scientific doubt from Scully could be used as "dramatic conflict." No need for that any longer. Mulder has had his vision and Scully will have hers.

Somehow David Duchovny forms a sterling performance. He's so moving as Mulder—in the diary scene, reading Samantha's tortured words, or looking up at the stars at the end—that one can only imagine what he he could have given us if the story had been truly worthy of his talents.

"We've got a report of a monster lurking around the neighborhood."
—Deputy Keith Wetzel

X-COPS ★

2/20/00. Written by Vince Gilligan. Directed by Michael Watkins. Editor: Louise A. Innes.

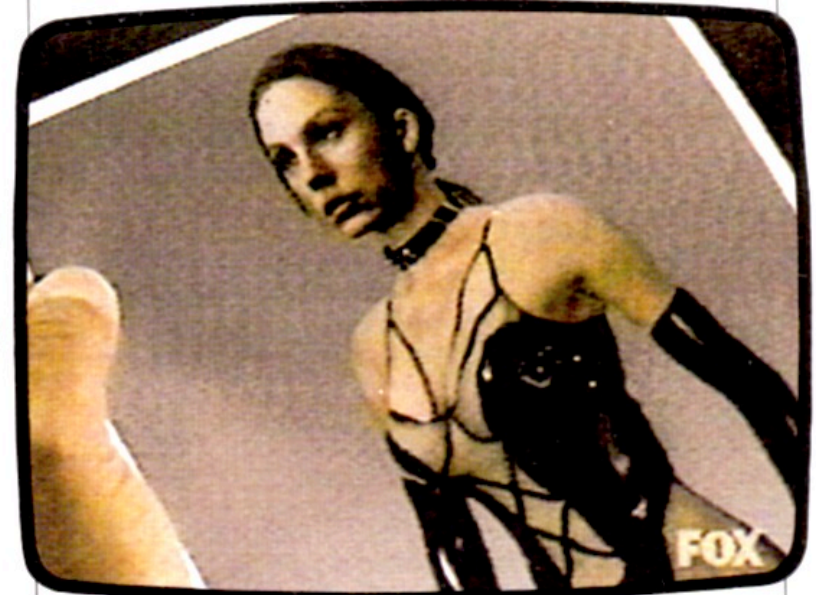
Who ya gonna call when there's a monster lurking in the neighborhood? The Los Angeles cops, of course, but as Deputy Keith Wetzel (Judson Mills) and his brothers and sisters in blue discover, Mulder and Scully are already on the case. So are a COPS camera crew, which has been assigned to record Wetzel as he makes his rounds that night. They capture some pretty peculiar footage, as well as a spectacular roll-over from

inside Wetzel's patrol car.

A crossover between THE X-FILES and COPS sounds like a dicey proposition, but "X-Cops," THE X-FILES' 150th episode, turns out to be one of the season's better hours. The various characters—Wetzel, his fellow officers, the respectable and not-so-respectable denizens of the working-class neighborhood they patrol—seem like people you see any given night on COPS. However, something you usually don't see on COPS is also out there, attacking and killing people, and everyone gives a different description of the attacker. Mulder, who at first thinks a werewolf is on the loose, soon comes up with another idea: he believes the creature is a fear monster which adapts itself to look like the thing its victim is most afraid of. So Wetzel sees a giant wasp man, an Hispanic woman sees Freddy Krueger, a prostitute sees her pimp, a morgue assistant instantly contracts and dies from the Hanta virus, etc.

Plunking Mulder and Scully down into this gritty, street-level milieu and watching their differing reactions to the COPS camera are X-COPS' prime pleasures. Duchovny and Anderson seem to be having great fun, with Mulder loving the attention from the COPS crew and "turning on" for the camera; Scully (in high dudgeon mode) finding the crew obtrusive, embarrassed to be on national television. The relationship between Mulder and Wetzel briefly takes on some resonance, when Wetzel, afraid to tell anyone he saw a wasp man, mentions to Mulder that it's hard to have a career in law enforcement when everyone thinks you're nuts, and Mulder responds, "Tell me about it."

See sidebar, page 32.



Cyberbabe Jade Blue Afterglow (Krista Allen) in "First Person Shooter," a William Gibson script that plays like a leftover from HARSH REALM.

"Welcome to the land where silicon meets silicone!"
—Langley

FIRST PERSON SHOOTER ★

2/27/00. Written by William Gibson & Tom Maddox. Directed by Chris Carter. Editor: Heather Macdougall.

This is the only episode Chris Carter directed seventh season (and his first directing effort on someone else's script). As the crowning touch of his directorial effort, he gives us one last shot of Scully's face—digitally rendered and plastered onto the hugely-endowed, barely-clad bod of a cyber-fantasy-babe. To quote Kurtz, the horror, the horror.

Since this is a virtual reality story, there must be a pile of unused HARSH REALM scripts right next to the MILLENNIUM stack. This one happens to be written by William Gibson and Tom Maddox. But you would never know from "First Person Shooter" that Gibson is one of the finest, most respected authors of literary science fiction.

Mulder and Scully investigate the mysterious death of a young man named Retro, who was testing a new and extremely violent virtual reality

Mulder and Deputy Chief Wetzel (Judson Mills) in COPS crossover "X-Cops," the series' 150th episode and one of the season's better efforts.



X-FILES

THE LONE GUNMEN

A spin-off series a la MISSION IMPOSSIBLE.

By Dan Persons

In a startling break with fans' expectations, the new **LONE GUNMEN** series will actually be a half-hour sitcom in which America's favorite conspiracy theorists give up their espionage-obsessed ways and decide to make a go of it running the nuttiest diner in Maryland. Come join Frohike, Langly, and Byers as they sling hash and trade quips with a regular cast of wacky customers, including Theodore, the dyslexic National Security Council operative, Nancy, the double-jointed White House intern, and Tyrone, the African-American Grand Wizard of the local KKK cell. Kidding, just kidding.

In actuality, **THE LONE GUNMEN**—which features the mighty intellectual powers of the computer nerds who regularly assisted Scully and Mulder with their investigations (as portrayed by Tom Braidwood, Dean Haglund, and Bruce Harwood)—will be a legitimate spin-off from **THE X-FILES**. And while the scenario cited above may well have sold back in the days when the Fox network was desperate for a comedy hit (in other words, pre-**MALCOLM IN THE MIDDLE**), the concept is only nominally less of a shock than Fox's eleventh hour decision to split off the cyber-trio into their own series. "No one was more surprised than me when they phoned up in February and said, 'How would you like to do a **LONE GUNMEN** pilot?'" admitted Tom "Frohike" Braidwood. "I mean, we'd joked about it over the years, but I certainly never seriously thought that they would do anything like that. But they have."

What winds up on TV screens when the program debuts next year will definitely be drama, though not necessarily the kind the **X-FILES** fans might expect. "The tone is probably more along the lines of **MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE**," said Braidwood. "The show itself won't go the route of **THE X-FILES**. It will go the conspiracy route, but



Now all they need is a snappy theme: Zuleikha Robinson joins Dean Haglund, Tom Braidwood and Bruce Harwood in the pilot as a mid-season replacement.

it's more real conspiracies and government and espionage and that kind of thing. It won't be delving into the unknown."

Still, with Chris Carter taking point as executive producer, and the team of Carter, Frank Spotnitz, and Vince Gilligan copping credit for the pilot script, the spin-off will likely carry forward on the story-telling qualities of its progenitor. "The whole team got down on the drawing board and worked on it together," said Braidwood. "I liked the script, I thought it was pretty tight. It was a good story line with good action and a certain amount of humor. Nice amount of humor—not comedy, but humor."

"The thing that impressed me the most was the delineation of the characters, particularly the three Lone Gunmen. I think both the script and the director were looking to make the characters very individual, and I think they've done that."

While Carter relied on his trusted captains to deliver a level of textual continuity with **THE X-FILES**, he turned to some seasoned crew to provide the visual link. "It was a minor variation," said D.P. Robert McLachlan, who also worked on Carter's **MILLENNIUM**, as well as James Wong and Glen Morgan's **FINAL DESTINATION**. "I never shot **THE X-FILES**. Some aspects of it, visually, I really like, and others I don't. Sometimes I find it a bit too self-conscious

in its efforts to be dark. Personally, that kind of throws me out of a story, because it just seems forced. You can't inflict a look on a scene if it's not there in the script and on the location.

"Having said that, there was an effort to be true to [**THE LONE GUNMEN**'s] **X-FILES** roots in terms of how we shot it. But, again, because it was a slightly lighter tone, we did alter things a little—not so much with the lighting and the sets, but in the way we actually photographed our heroes. The lighting was closer to what I did on **MILLENNIUM** than **THE X-FILES**. That's a matter of personal taste, actually; I like a more limited

palate in the color of light that I use. I find that it's more tasteful, so I used less bright colors than you've seen in the Lone Gunmen's subterranean headquarters. I think it's more simple and clean. Chris Carter and the rest of the producers on the show were very happy with how it looks so far."

The decision-makers at Fox have clearly joined Carter and crew in their delight, enough so to give **THE LONE GUNMEN** the full go-ahead, likely as a mid-season replacement to debut at the beginning of 2001. Whatever the outcome of the new venture, though, Braidwood seemed satisfied with the experience, noting that his character has taken him further than he ever dreamed. "This is obviously something that's caught the imagination of the viewers and that they wanted to see more of. So that's what the producers are giving them. When I initially did it, there was never any thought in my mind that it was going to be anything else than one day of work."

"One of the nice things about this, and one of its strengths, is that [Bruce, Dean and I] have a very good relationship, which has developed over the seven years. The odd times that we've met and worked together, we've always had a very solid relationship, we're always seen each other as equals, we've seen each other as a unit. We have fun both on-set and off-set when we're together." □

X-FILES

THE MAKING OF "X-COPS"

Behind-the-scenes, filming the popular crossover.

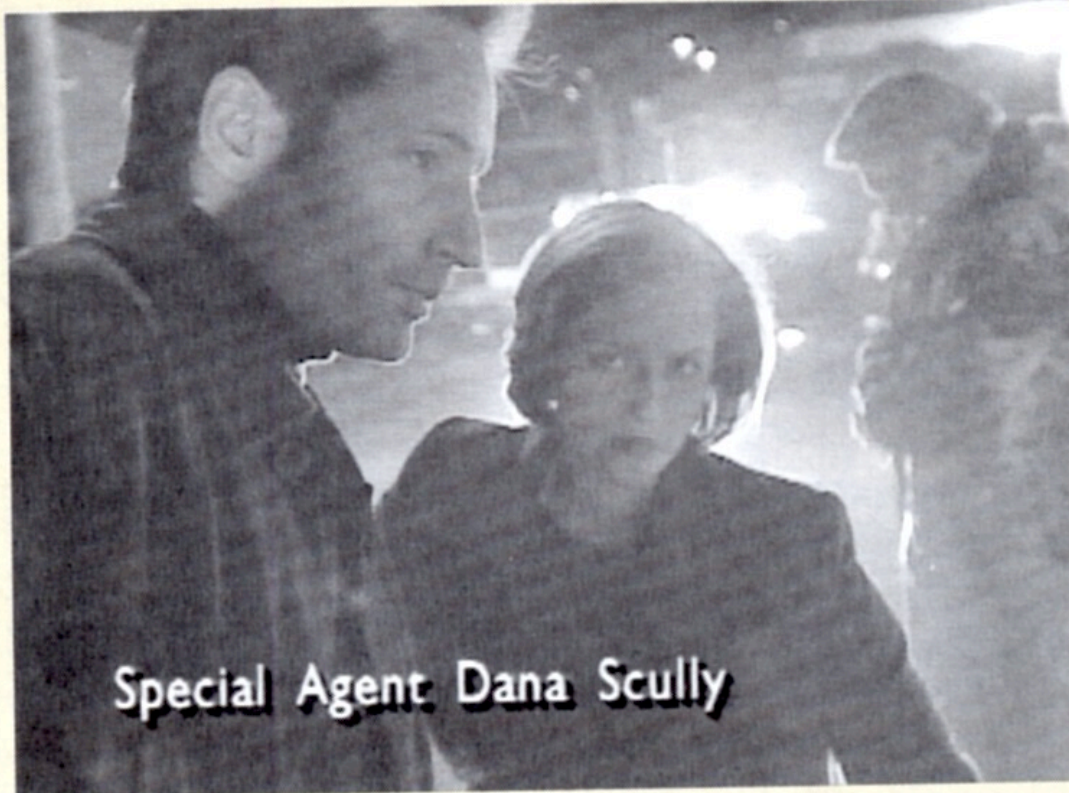
By Dan Persons

In the had-to-happen-sooner-or-later category, two Fox classics finally joined forces in the X-FILES episode, "X-Cops." No, Mulder didn't discover that THE FAMILY GUY was actually an evil mind-control plot engineered by the Cigarette Smoking Man—instead, the ever-questing FBI agent and his partner Scully found themselves smack in the middle of a shoot for the reality TV series COPS. Better them than Luke Perry, I guess.

Shot on videotape in the less-than-glamorous environs of Venice, California, "X-Cops" finds Scully and Mulder joining forces with the L.A. County Sheriff's department and trailed by a camera crew (which quickly multiplies once the producers realize that they're no longer covering a typical crack-house bust), all on a quest for a homicidal monster who comes out only during the full moon.

"It was an idea that I'd always wanted to do for at least two or three seasons," said episode author Vince Gilligan. "Way back, I think, in Season 4, I approached Chris Carter with the idea of having a crossover episode between the show COPS and our show. It seemed a natural to me, because I was thinking that with Mulder and Scully at the heart of it, THE X-FILES is a cop show. What if they were to just one day appear on the TV show COPS? I was milling that around in my head; I pitched it to Chris, and at the time he was a little reluctant. But one thing led to another and I got to do it [seventh] season.

"The longer we've been on the air, the more chances we've taken. We try to keep the show fresh; we try very hard not to do the same old thing. I think [Carter] appreciated that, saw the positive side to that. To be frank, and I don't know if this was his thinking, it might have been a part of the network's, this was a good [way to play off] THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT. That



Special Agent Dana Scully

Shot on videotape COPS-style, Mulder and Scully track a homicidal monster, an X-FILES script idea Vince Gilligan first broached as far back as season four.

movie came out and did very well and essentially was a story about strange and scary goings-on being caught live on videotape, and that's in a sense what this is."

Of course, merging the reality of COPS with the imagination of THE X-FILES meant some delicate maneuvers on the part of the storyline. Said Gilligan, "It was something that I got myself into by pushing so hard to do this episode. It was interesting. The hardest single thing was that we all agreed from the beginning that, if the conceit is that Mulder and Scully are on a national television show, we can't really give proof of the paranormal on national TV, as it were. So we tied our own hands, saying that we can't really show a monster, it could only be hinted at. Then THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT came out and showed us how you could do that in a way and still make it scary. Hopefully, we succeeded in that regard. Basically, Mulder gets on national TV, and the reason why he likes being on TV is that he's hoping he can get proof of the paranormal cashiered on videotape for an audience of millions to see. And, of course, as it usually works out on THE X-FILES, we experience some pretty weird things, but we never give the concrete proof that he's been after. So it's a little bit of a

disappointment for him at the end, he doesn't really have the proof he wants. If we were to give him that, it would change the whole direction of the series."

Directing duties on "X-Cops" were handled by Michael Watkins, who, as producer, helped get the series up to speed during its move to California, and has since helmed several episodes, including seventh season's mythos offerings "Amor Fati" and "Sein und Zeit." "It was a lot of fun," Watkins said of the "X-Cops" experience. "We all watch COPS here, and we got ahold of [executive producer] John Langley—this clearly is an homage to COPS. We changed the format from film to video and really

shot it in the style of COPS, true to form: following the back of the head; panning through cars; doing long, long 'oners,' [takes]—very long oners; five, six pages—starting on one block where the officers are in a staging area and getting some information, moving over to Mulder and Scully, walking down a block and half and running behind them, then going right inside a crack house and going through the crack house, seeing the arrests, feeling that blackness and that scariness, finding the body, hearing the gunshots up the street, turning around, running out, all without a cut.

"It would be long rehearsals; we'd have 17 talking parts and 35 people; we had helicopters with night-skies flying overhead; we would walk-through with stunt drivers and people moving all around. We'd just do long rehearsals, walking rehearsals. There were four cameramen there—basically all of us ended up shooting the show. Sometimes we let the operator see the scene and sometimes not—we'd let him come in there cold. The trick was putting together the dramatic moments within this videotape homage."

It turned out that the shift from the expected, cinematic approach of the typical X-FILES episode to a more verité style of filmmaking was one of the larger hurdles for



Mulder and Scully get busted, finding themselves smack in the middle of a shoot for Fox's reality-based series *COPS*, a clever 7th season crossover scripted by Vince Gilligan and directed by Michael Watkins.

the show's actors to overcome. "The first day or two was difficult," Watkins admitted. "The actors came in thinking, 'Okay, we'll do a master, there'll be my close-up here, we'll work on that...'" It took everyone a couple of days to really get a sense of, 'By gosh, we're going.' Once that started happening, an interesting phenomenon occurred: the first day or so we'd do eight, nine, ten, eleven takes before we would pick one. Once they were there with it, suddenly we were doing two takes. That was even more shocking. In a sense we were doing theater: we were doing an act, or half of a whole act in one take."

Which didn't mean that the tricks of the trade were completely ignored. A surreptitious cut during the teaser replaced actor Judson Mills—playing doomed rookie Keith Wetzel—with a stunt person for the moment when both cop and camera crew were trapped in an overturning police car. Meanwhile, Watkins—shooting largely in sequence—worked to avoid such manipulations. "We'd start a scene in one neighborhood, drive a mile and a half away, get out and finish it—and we're talking a lot of people at each end, and in the middle between the destinations. Everyone really got into it. I think that what it did was really pack the realism, the naturalness, onto the tape. If there was an accident, if there was a flub, if [the actors] were searching for something, we'd stay in there with them and keep it real. Everyone supported everyone, and I thought it got to be a lot of fun."

Judson Mills, who's better known to viewers for his work as Gage on *WALKER*,

“The longer we’ve been on the air, the more chances we’ve taken. We try to keep the show fresh. I think [Carter] appreciated that, saw the positive side to it.”

—Writer Vince Gilligan—

was dealing with, like the cats running around, or the people walking across the street while I was driving, or sounds and events, you had to incorporate them all into what was going on, so much of it was on the fly. I thought it added a real element of excitement to the work—you started here and you did some dialogue, then you drove a few blocks and something happened and you took off and you raced around a few more blocks, and then you stopped and got out and talked some more, and then you did some more stuff and went to a house and went around the back and got chased and it's all one big, long take. There's no stopping, and if you stop or if you blow it, it's back to square one for everybody.

"It was actually quite funny driving around dressed as a cop in those cars, doing what we were doing. There was so little crew around and so little supervision that people just behaved as though we were cops. I had other cops waving and giving their signals or heads-up the way that they do amongst themselves. It was quite funny to see how differently people reacted to you, really believing you're a cop. A lot of things, like people walking across the street, or the black cat that showed up in the opening scene, were just stuff that took place that we had to deal with in the moment." □

TEXAS RANGER, claimed the unorthodox production process was not quite the hardship some might fear: "I really enjoyed it. I prefer working that way, it's very much like being in theater. It was very exciting, because Michael Watkins was wonderful about giving us a little latitude to go in the moment with what was going on. In a lot of the takes, the things that I

game called "First Person Shooter." Somehow the young man died for real, shot through the chest, even though all the opponents were completely digital creations. Investigation reveals a gorgeous female figure inside the game shot Retro, and her elimination becomes even more paramount when she cuts off the hands and head of another young man sent into the game to defeat her.

It's hard to believe that William Gibson, one of science fiction's finest authors, and writing partner Tom Maddox came up with this piece of nonsense. First of all, the x-file itself becomes completely lost amongst all the digital mayhem. The two bodies are there, the question is asked how they really died—but no one, not even Scully, ventures a real-world explanation. So we are supposed to believe that a digital character can physically kill people. In fact, we're supposed to believe that a real person can be sucked into the digital world of the game so that he physically disappears, as happens with Mulder. It's not really a computer game, it's more like a virtual reality laser tag, played out in a huge game space.

But "First Person Shooter" pretends to have ambitions beyond giving us a really good shoot-out. It wants to critique, through the prism of the computer gaming industry, male assumptions and aggressiveness, but its portraits of men are so cartoonish that it really has nothing to say about how men truly think and act. It indulges in so many scenes of violence that it becomes the thing it is critiquing; it loves its gunplay far too much. The women—woman, actually, there is a lone female programmer, named Phoebe (Constance Zimmer)—are no better than the men and just as stereotyped. Phoebe is an anxiety-ridden wimp. She created Maitreya, the female slayer, to be everything she cannot be—but, as it turns out, Maitreya's killer aggression is derived from the pumped-up testosterone released by the men playing the game. So much for female independence, even when it comes to killing; Maitreya, too, is at the mercy of those nasty male hormones, not to mention that her design is every bit as appealing to the testosterone-driven as any male-created digital babe. Phoebe's design instincts are not exactly liberated. Of course, no one offers an explanation on how real life testosterone pumping into a man's system can affect a digital character.

Ironically, the one truly human moment in this story comes with the appearance of the real-life model for Maitreya, a superhumanly gorgeous woman called Jade Blue Afterglow, played by Krista Allen of the *EMMANUELLE* movies. Allen is not a great actress by any means, but she manages to convey, in a quietly contemptuous way, Jade Blue's disdain for the stupid police officers (they're just as caricatured as any other male in this episode) sniffing around her.

Finally, then there's the spectacle of Mulder, and later Scully, going into the game to save the Lone Gunmen, who have invested money in "First Person Shooter" and have been trying to figure out what went wrong in the game space. When the

Decked out in super-cool sunglasses and body armour in "First Person Shooter," Mulder's silliest moment in a script by William Gibson.



game comes on by itself, threatening the trio, Mulder comes to the rescue, decked out in super-cool sunglasses (Why? It's dark in there!), leather body armor, and a gun the size of the Empire State Building. It's the silliest shot of Mulder ever, and not even meant as a humorous comment (unlike, say, the shot of "GQ Mulder" in "Humbug"). That Scully has to go into the game to save Mulder's ineffectual ass doesn't say anything, since she is just as ineffectual as he. The game is finally shut down from the control booth in one of those last-minute saves you see only on TV and in the movies. (Why didn't they just unplug the computer to begin with?) Scully's donning of FPS leather turns out to be merely an excuse to give Zack the programmer the idea to turn her into the next super-cyber-babe, as explained in a supremely unnecessary, supremely moronic, last-minute Mulder monologue.

The special effects are effective enough, but they're eye candy; they're there simply because this is a virtual reality story. They don't add to the story. A lot of guns get shot off in "First Person Shooter," but it's still a misfire from beginning to end.

"Stinky's good."

—Peattie

THEEF

★★ 1/2

3/5/00. Written by Vince Gilligan, John Shiban, Frank Spotnitz. Directed by Kim Manners. Editor: Lynne Willingham.

"Theef" is a revenge drama, so no wonder that vengeful Appalachian father, Mr. Peattie (Billy Drago), speaks like a character not all that far removed from a bloodthirsty play of the Jacobean era. His target is the family of wealthy San Francisco doctor Robert Wieder (James Morrison), who Peattie blames for killing his daughter. The young woman had been mortally injured in a horrific bus accident and emergency room physician Wieder "pushed" her morphine to the point that she died perhaps 20 minutes earlier than she would have anyway. But Peattie, a folk magician, feels that Wieder had no right to end her life, even if it also ended her suffering, and that if he, Peattie, had been there, he might have saved her with his charms and potions. He believes Wieder has robbed him of his daughter; and thus (in Peattie's antiquated spelling, written in blood on Wieder's living-room wall), Wieder is a "theef." The stage is set for a confrontation between the power of modern medicine and the efficacy of folk magic. This being THE X-FILES, magic wins out, until stopped by technology in the form of a bullet.

Mulder and Scully step into this confrontation when Wieder's family members start dying in strange and unaccountable ways, thanks to Peattie's black magic spells. His favorite charm is a doll, called a "poppet," stuffed with a photo of the victim, which he then mutilates in some way

Billy Drago as Peattie, an Appalachian folk magician who exacts revenge on the physician who failed to save the life of his daughter.

X-FILES

VINCE GILLIGAN

The writer/producer on devising some of 7th season's best shows.

By Dan Persons

Vince Gilligan was at it again. In "Hungry," he dared us to have sympathy for the Devil, this time presenting the story from the point of view of a monster trying desperately to overcome his own monstrousness. In "Theef," he suggested that the most benevolent of us are not immune to the furies of blind vengeance. In "X-Cops," he pushed at the seams of an X-FILES story so hard that it wound-up tumbling smack into the middle of a COPS shoot. Give the guy his props: when he sits behind the keyboard to actually script an episode, phrases like "typical X-FILES episode" go right out the window.

"It's not conscious," said Gilligan of his tendency towards writing envelope-pushing scenarios. "We're always trying to outdo ourselves and give the audience something it hasn't seen before. But as far as how we decide the mix: 'Is this episode going to be a funny one, a serious one?' it doesn't really work like that. It's more about us saying, 'What's going to be a good episode this week?' Just sometimes you start with a great scene in your head, a great, scary moment. Sometimes you start with a funny line or a funny character you thought of, or a scary character. It just sort of takes on a life of its own. That's why, probably, [sixth] season, we did a lot of lighter episodes, more humorous episodes."

Gilligan got an early start to toying with THE X-FILES formula [seventh] season, offering up "Hungry," about a predator who feasts on human brains and how his efforts to overcome his addiction eventually lead to disaster. The twist: this time the story took



Gilligan, devising off-beat entries like "Hungry," "Theef" and "X-Cops."

the monster's part, following events from his point of view while Mulder and Scully became occasional, and threatening, walk-ons in the unfortunate creature's life. Said Gilligan, "The idea originally was that we do so many monster shows, what if we did one from the monster's point of view, so that Mulder and Scully are occasionally interloping into this guy's life? We don't know what's going on with them when they're not in his presence, we don't have their usual back-and-forth banter, except in the beginning when he's

eavesdropping on them through the ordering microphone at the restaurant. Playing it all from this guy's point of view was fun, it was interesting. Of course, it made it really hard to write—I figured, if this guy is going to be the guy we follow throughout the show, we've got to understand why he does what he does, and we have to sympathize with him on some level. I figured the best way to sympathize with this guy was to show these terrible things he does, but then realize that he hates himself for doing them.

"When we were halfway through it, someone said to me, 'It's a lot like M, the movie with Peter Lorre.' I said, 'Yeah, I guess it is.' I hadn't really thought of that in advance." A not-dissimilar empathy was at work when Gilligan joined forces with John Shiban and Frank Spotnitz to script "Theef," a tale in which a conjure-man sets his powers against the doctor who, he feels, has destroyed his life.

"It's a story about modern medicine versus mountain magic," Gilligan said. "Essentially, it's a revenge story in which there's a very well-respected and brilliant doctor in the San Francisco Bay area who's just a really



Chad E. Donella as Rob Roberts in "Hungry," Gilligan's mutant-of-the-week episode about a boy who longs to be normal but is compelled to eat people's brains, which he sucks out of their skulls, with Judith Hoag.

nice guy. He's a good doctor, he works in a hospital—suddenly, he's got this guy setting out to destroy his family and he doesn't know why. It's a guy from Appalachia who practices mountain magic, which is this stuff we researched into.

"As we try to do with most of our stuff, it's based, if not on reality, then at least on pre-existing myth about Appalachian folk magic.

Whether it's real or not I won't get into, but it's [supposed to be] mostly beneficial stuff: healing people, healing the sick, making people's lives good. But this guy uses it for evil, and he uses these things called 'pop-pets,' which are basically voodoo dolls. It's sort of a Scottish/Appalachian folk magic. This guy is basically destroying this good doctor's life because the doctor made a very valid call in the E.R. one day and didn't save this Appalachian guy's daughter who had been in a terrible bus accident. The doctor did him wrong and ruined his family, so now he's out to get him.

"You don't really understand where the guy's coming from until later in the episode. When you do, it's not as if you suddenly feel he's right, but that you at least understand where he's coming from; you understand why he does what he does. I don't know why I do that, it's just, I guess, to me the world doesn't make a lot of sense. You hear about horrible things like the high-school shootings in Littleton, those kinds of things that are just terrible and you can't make sense out of them when you're watching them on the TV. When I write about stuff like that, the stuff that happens in our episodes is pretty terrible, too, but maybe it's me trying to figure out why people do

“Every now and then we like to throw the fans a curve ball, to make it clear we're still trying our hardest, doing our best to keep the show fresh and original.”

—Scripter Vince Gilligan—

the things they do. Mainly it's trying to be entertaining, but it just seems more interesting to explain why the bad guy's bad than just to say 'He's evil,' and that's all there is to it."

Gilligan pointed to one extra real-life wrinkle that locked in seventh season's "X-Cops" sense of believability: "The neat thing for me was that every cop you saw in the show, except for the two

main characters, is a real, working, L.A. County deputy. [They were] on their days off and gave the show a tremendous amount of reality and a tremendous amount of technical accuracy that we couldn't have pulled off with just actors. They helped the real actors look more like cops; they just gave the whole thing an air of authenticity."

Do the stories that break out of the expected X-FILES box ever make Gilligan nervous? "They do, they absolutely do. But we've all been here a while now—I've been with the show for four years and the show's been running seven.

"We still love writing middle-of-the-road, straight-down-the-middle X-FILES, and we still plan that the bulk of our shows should be just good, scary X-FILES, the kind of shows the fans have been tuning in to see since season one. But every now and then we like to throw the fans a curve ball, just to make it clear that we're still trying our hardest, doing our best to keep the show fresh and original.

"Sometimes maybe we go too far out on a limb—I have probably been guilty of that before. It make me nervous every time we do something like this, but that nervousness is also excitement. It keeps us interested." □

that is instantly felt by the real person.

Although "Theef" is burdened with some illogical plot developments and some underdeveloped characterization, overall it is a decent installment of THE X-FILES. It has a fine guest actor in James Morrison (McQueen in SPACE: ABOVE AND BEYOND) as Wieder, who ably captures all of Wieder's agony and guilt over his father-in-law and wife's deaths, and his ambivalence concerning his role in Lynn Peattie's death, however justified he still feels he may have been in administering the overdose of morphine. The episode also has one of TV's consummate villains, Billy Drago, his face more ravaged than ever, as the unrelenting father. And every fear one has of hospital procedures is summed up in a memorably gruesome scene when Wieder places his stricken wife (the elegant Kate McNeil) into an MRI machine, assuring her all will be fine; then, a minute later, when he notices her legs thrashing, he pulls out her charred remains. Peattie has cooked her poppet in the hospital cafeteria's microwave, using modern technology to serve his magic and thus cause the malfunction of another device of modern technology. Pamela Gordon contributes a comic performance as the basso-voiced proprietor of a folk charm shop.

Drago's character does not receive the full treatment he deserves. With his quaint speech and enchanted goofer dust, he is like a wizard out of another time and place, a Prospero deserted by Miranda and become malign by her loss. He also comes off as an ignorant backwoods hick, never allotted the full dimension of his grief. Perhaps if he been treated with more ambiguity and allowed to realize that his murders not only would not bring back Lynn, but have made him even worse than the doctor he so despises, he might have been one of THE X-FILES' most compelling villains.

"What the hell are you doing?" —Scully

"God's work, what else?" —The Cigarette Smoking Man

EN AMI ★ 1/2

3/19/00. Written by William B. Davis. Directed by Rob Bowman. Editor: Louise A. Innes.

Did someone remove Scully's brain and fill the empty space with straw? In last season's "Milagro," she had a preposterous attraction to a stalker. In "En ami," written by the Cigarette Smoking Man himself, William B. Davis, she is so tempted by one of the CSM's propositions that she ditches Mulder (payback for all the times he's ditched her?) and goes off on a road trip to Pennsylvania, hoping against hope that the CSM will deliver on his promise. They are to meet "Cobra," a government scientist who has agreed to hand over a disc with alien-derived information that will cure all human disease.

Since the CSM is involved, "En Ami" is full of the expected twists and turns. Surprise, the CSM's

The CSM adds sexual predator to his dossier of villainy in "En Ami," as Scully undresses during their cross-country road trip. Is he the father?



X-FILES

WILLIAM B. DAVIS

The Cigarette Smoking Man on turning scripter.

By Dan Persons

Fans of THE X-FILES have already come to the conclusion that the series, in and of itself, is a modern-day classic. But when William B. Davis, the actor best known for his seven-season stint as the malevolent Cigarette Smoking Man, decided to script a seventh season episode in which Dana Scully must set aside her fears of the CSM for the potential benefit of all humankind, the newly-minted author decided to rely on a classic with a bit more pedigree.

"The idea was originally derived from Richard III," Davis said. "There's a famous scene between Richard III and Lady Anne in which Richard realizes, despite the fact that he murdered Lady Anne's husband and her father-in-law, she is the person he needs to marry in order to further his ambitions. So he happens to come upon her while she's mourning her father-in-law—she's obviously furious with him—and, in the process of 15 minutes or so, convinces her he's done it all for love of her. She just about agrees to marry him at the end. It's one of the most amazing scenes in dramatic literature, where the villain puts on an act to gain his effect. In Richard, he has the advantage of a soliloquy to the audience, so he can say to them, 'Now look what I'm going to do...' In television, we can't do that. In an earlier version, when Fowley was still alive, I had her as a confidant. CSM could tell Fowley what he was going to do and the audience would know it was an act. As it comes out now, we don't know."

The resulting episode, "En Ami," was Davis' first script for the series, though not for lack of trying. "I experimented with ideas for the show for some time," the actor admitted. "But I found it quite challenging to get an idea that really worked. I would get so far with something and I'd think, 'Nope, this doesn't work,' and I'd toss it off. It wasn't really until I got to this one that I felt confident enough to go to [the producers] and present it as an idea.

"It was rather different when I presented it. It was more something that would have



Davis wrote the script for "En Ami," only to be killed-off in season-ender "Requiem." The CSM refused to give-up smoking, using a tracheotomy tube out of DEAD AGAIN.

gone on inside Scully's mind, it would be kind of like her nightmare of CSM. That would have been an interesting counterbalance to the second episode of this season [the LAST TEMPTATION-like "Amor Fati"], which was sort of Mulder's dream of CSM. But they kind of felt they'd done the dream idea enough. They really liked the idea of that dynamic, though, and wanted it to be real, something that really happened. And so we started there, working out a storyline that we all were happy with. I wrote the script, then Chris Carter re-wrote the script—which I gather is quite common—and that's what went to air."

In the episode, the Cigarette Smoking Man appeals to Scully's sympathy, informing her that he's dying of cancer but that, with her help, he may be able to acquire information on an alien technology that could result in the elimination of cancer for all time. Moved but cautious, Scully agrees to accompany her nemesis on a cross-country odyssey, CSM's sole condition being that Fox Mulder not know of their mission. The storyline thus became an ideal setup for extended exchanges

between erstwhile enemies Scully and CSM—a dramatic development that was by no means an accident, according to Davis: "To be candid, one of the reasons I wrote this thing in the first place was that I had waited six years and they still hadn't given me a scene with [Gillian Anderson]. So I did it myself.

"I found Scully's voice came quite well; as did Skinner's and the Lone Gunmen. I found myself not quite so sure with Mulder, oddly enough. That may have been because he was less fundamental to my storyline—he wasn't as engaged. Curiously, one of the things that was most re-written by Chris and the story department was CSM's dialogue, which I thought I might know something about. That was partly because I felt that he was a better actor than they felt. To put it another way, they were anxious that he should appear quite like he had appeared before, and not be so much of a surprise."

Which, as it turned out, left Davis with the not-inconsequential task of allowing Scully and the audience a more human

view of the Cigarette Smoking Man without robbing the character of his deadly mystery. Said Davis, "We talked about this. Frank Spotnitz fights against that. He's afraid of the thing losing its tension because too much sympathy accrues to the character. And yet, we are doing things in this and other episodes, that do show a side of him that may garner some sympathy."

From Davis' point of view, though, that's only a natural progression for a character who has survived seven seasons of shadowy doings. "He's certainly become more of a whole person, although not losing his position of symbolic evil. I think now, in the late stages of the series, there's a certain question of whether we want to show the underlying motives. Do we want to give the audience a chance to empathize with this character, or do we want to continue seeing him as an embodiment of evil? Sometimes I worry that they want to make him a little pathetic. I fight against that, whatever we do. But he's certainly become a much more complex character."

Fortunately for Davis, who, beyond THE



In "En Ami" Scully obtains alien-derived data that will supposedly cure all human disease, a script by Davis inspired by a scene in Shakespeare's "Richard III," the most amazing villainy in dramatic literature.

X-FILES, is active in Shakespearean theater and teaches drama classes, there's no confusion between the actor and his role. That's a helpful trait when one has to deal with an occasionally less-than-grounded public: "I don't think I've become this iconic figure. I'm an actor who plays this iconic figure, although I understand that there seems to be some confusion out there. I've had people kind of get confused. I always think, 'Wouldn't it be nice if people said, 'Oh, there's William B. Davis,' instead of 'Oh, there's the Smoking Man?'" I guess that's the nature of TV.

"Certainly, the people who talk to me seem to be quite clear that they understand that I'm an actor who plays this character. They don't come up to me as if I was going to behave like that. But I often hear about people who didn't come up to me. Here's an example: somebody said they thought they saw me standing outside my acting school, but then they realized that it wasn't me, because I was smiling. I mean, he was convinced! So that's odd. That's very odd."

In actuality, Davis remains as committed a fan of THE X-FILES as any viewer. Having seen the bulk of the seventh season episodes, he has developed his own opinions on the series' status, although he steadfastly cautions against looking at this climactic year as a summation of the entire series: "No, no I wouldn't say that at all, actually. Just kind of speaking as a fan, it's almost, to some extent, a new departure. One of the things that I noticed [this season] on the whole issue of the paranormal is

“[THE X-FILES] touched the nerve of not knowing what's real and what's not. It's the nerve of the '90s because of the Internet, because of computer technology.”

—Actor William B. Davis—

that, in the earlier seasons, the paranormal elements that were dealt with were quite often elements that a lot of people believe in...and a lot of people don't. Quite a lot of the paranormal things they've done this season have been things nobody believes in, like the character who's always lucky, for instance. In that way, it's not really impinging on our consciousness of the world as we really see it, it's more obviously fictional. I make no value judgement on that, but it's different, and it may have to be. I mean, how many paranormal things are there?"

Still, Davis feels that THE X-FILES' greatest value may be the way it successfully reflected the temper of its times. "I think its unique success was a product of the nineties. It really touched the nerve of not knowing what's real and what's not real. It was the nerve of the nineties, because of the Internet, because of computer technology, because of getting our information—if you like—from little dots on a screen rather than from print on a page. It changed the way people looked at the world. There's a whole lot to it, and I can talk for hours about it, but the essence of it is the uncertainty of what's real, what can be believed. And because there's an uncertainty about that, that breeds a paranoia, that breeds the possibility of conspiracies, and so on.

"I think THE X-FILES tapped that nerve in the nineties. That's what turned a good show into a phenomenon. I think now, it's just a good show again. Not because the show has changed—although it has—but because its time has passed." □

henchman shoots Cobra as soon as he hands the disc to Scully! Surprise, the CSM kills his henchman before the man finishes Scully off! And a major surprise: Scully discovers there's nothing on the disc after she takes it back to Washington for analysis! (Maybe Scully should have prepared for this adventure by reading the Charlie Brown comic strips where Lucy always pulls the football away at the last moment.)

And there's a new and distinctly unpleasant dimension to the CSM's attitude towards Scully: sexual predator. Over the years the highly unerotic CSM has been revealed as the ex-husband of Cassandra Spender and father of Jeffrey Spender, the ex-lover of Mrs. Mulder and possible father of Samantha and/or Fox (these paternity issues are almost as annoying as the Scully/Mulder-will-they-or-won't they storyline) and possible partner to kinky doings with Diana Fowley. In "En Ami," he first appears in a re-enactment of the classic molester-in-the-car-offering-candy scenario, although his candy is scientific information. He somehow drugs Scully during the trip (we don't see it), and off-camera, removes her clothes (recalling the similar off-camera actions of James Stewart in VERTIGO with Kim Novak), dresses her in pajamas and puts her to bed. Later he offers her a little black dress to wear to dinner, a dress that reveals much more décolletage than one is used to seeing on Scully. The CSM never makes an overt pass at Scully, but the expression in his eyes pretty much says it all. Like so many other character "developments" this season, the CSM's sexually charged treatment of Scully comes out of the blue.

The production design and cinematography of "En Ami" are stunningly beautiful; the lighting is lush and burnished. Gillian Anderson hasn't been lit this flatteringly in a long time. But it's all in service of mythologizing the CSM, who, despite an initially white-faced, sickly appearance, looks normal throughout the rest of the episode, and, at the end, assumes an aura of (unearned) tragedy.

There is one lovely scene in "En Ami," after Scully has returned and the Lone Gunmen try in vain to retrieve information off the disc. While the Lone Gunmen work, and Scully sits there, a silent Mulder boils in the room's doorway, unable to look at Scully. Not only has she done a very foolish thing and returned a dupe (as he could have told her she'd be), but she has usurped Mulder's place in his narrative, the one where he is the hero, too, the only one meant to face down the villain. How dare the CSM reject him! It's a painfully honest moment.

See Davis interview, page 28.

"I get the feeling you're not used to anyone taking care of you."

—Ellen Adderly to Mulder

CHIMERA

★★ 1/2

4/2/00. Written by Daniel Amann. Directed by Cliff Bole. Editor: Heather Macdougall.

The family unit, in THE X-FILES, is the locus

The monster of "Chimera" glimpsed fleetingly in a car window, as the rage of a Vermont woman turns her, Hyde-like, into a vengeful beast.



of betrayal, deception and pain, especially when the head of household also fulfills the role of public caretaker as a government employee. "Chimera" takes us into the heart of a quintessential X-FILES family, when Mulder journeys to bucolic Bethany, Vermont, to solve the murder of the daughter of a federal judge. By the end of the episode, Sheriff Phil Adderly (John Mese), a friendly, all-American kind of husband and father, will be exposed as a double adulterer; his lovers are the dead woman (a wife and mother and best friend of Adderly's wife, Ellen) and a local waitress (a neglectful single mom). To compound the tragedy, Ellen, the "good" wife and mother, literally turns out to be a murderous monster, spawned by those who have killed the bonds of family.

"Chimera" gets off to an awkward start, with Mulder and Scully on stakeout in a seamy section of Washington, hoping to catch a serial killer who's targeting prostitutes. It doesn't seem like an x-file, but nevertheless, that's what they're doing, and Scully hates their grimy surroundings. There's no real explanation given why Skinner assigns only Mulder to the Vermont case. (In real life, Gillian Anderson was busy prepping her writing and directing debut in the following week's "All Things," so her role in "Chimera" had to be reduced.)

In Bethany, Mulder stays at the home of Sheriff Adderly, his wife Ellen (Michelle Joyner) and their young daughter. He hears reports of ravens scaring the daughter of the dead woman, and then Ellen tells him she has seen a monster—a tall, filthy creature. The report of the monster and various broken mirrors and windows leads Mulder to suspect someone has summoned forth a creature to kill Martha, but before long he begins to unravel the real duplicity at the heart of the case, and by the end the origin of the monster is revealed: it is Ellen herself, whose suppressed rage at her husband's infidelities manifests itself in some kind of Jekyll and Hyde phenomenon. Director Cliff Bole reveals her fractured personality in a number of doubling shots, as we see Ellen's form reflected in mirrors and windows. Sometimes when she looks at the glass, what she sees (and what we see) is the face of the monster. No wonder the glass always shatters. Also, quite nicely, the victims first see the monster in a mirror, too, suggesting that they, too, are part of what makes up the monster.

"Ah, Hurricane Scully has arrived."
—Dr. Daniel Waterston

ALL THINGS

4/2/00. Written and directed by Gillian Anderson. Editor: Lynne Willingham.

Gillian Anderson makes her writing and directing debut with "All Things," an episode that takes us where this show has gone before: Scully in emotional crisis, torn between what

Scully in emotional crisis, torn between what her life might have been and what it is, has an epiphany in "All Things." Then it's back to reset.



Scully experiences a vision in front of the statue of Buddha in "All Things," an episode written and directed with a heavy hand by Gillian Anderson.

her life might have been and what it is. By the end, Scully has achieved another of those life-altering moments that, like so many others on THE X-FILES, will never again be mentioned. While one can respect Anderson's desire to penetrate Scully's heart and mind, her storyline is one that plays havoc with Scully's motivations and character as established in the past seven years, and her direction is heavy-handed at best.

A filing mishap at a hospital inadvertently leads Scully to a meeting with her med school teacher and former lover, Dr. Daniel Waterston (Nicolas Surovy), now admitted to the hospital as a cardiac patient. We soon learn that—right out of a soap opera—Scully's motivation for joining the FBI was not a desire to prove herself in law enforcement, capture predators and help the innocent, but to escape her memories of Waterston! Daniel is a most unattractive character—basically, he's a manipulative creep who expects Scully to believe him when he tells her he lives only for her—and a miscast Surovy does nothing to give him a modicum of vulnerability or sympathy.

Fate leads Scully to a Buddhist temple, where she experiences a vision of Daniel, transparent, his heart pumping in his chest. The next thing we know, Scully has abandoned Western rationalism entirely, and brought a holistic healer to Daniel's side. Even Mulder, who once denounced "New Age crap," would be shaking his head at this point. Scully's religious focus has always been on Catholicism; but Anderson, whose interest in Eastern thought and religion has been well-publicized and who said she wanted this episode to reflect her ideas, imposes the Eastern worldview as the framework for Scully's transformation, even though Scully hasn't evinced the slightest interest in it in the past, and its appearance here is most contrived. Perhaps even Anderson has doubts, since the healer pronounces a comatose Waterston on the verge of death, yet the doctor miraculously bounces back—although whether it's the healer, Scully's care, or Western medicine, is anyone's guess—just so Scully can finally tell him what an irresponsible person he's been and then bid him farewell. She's finally gotten over him.

Anderson's direction becomes self-indulgent, with endless close-ups of Scully's teary eyes and face, as she contemplates the emptiness of her life or worries over Daniel's failing body. To top things off, the episode suggests, in that maddening pre-adolescent X-FILES way, that Mulder and Scully may have slept together! It opens with Scully facing a bathroom mirror, putting her clothes on, rambling in voice-over yet another deadly monologue, this time about one's choices in life. She exits the apartment and the camera turns to the bed, where Mulder, obviously naked under the covers, is sleeping. Everything then proceeds in flashback, and at the end of the episode, Scully and Mulder, sitting on Mulder's couch, have a conversation

about Scully's experiences (this is actually a nice moment, since Scully and Mulder discuss their own lives with each other so infrequently). The scene ends with Mulder tucking a blanket around a sleeping Scully—in slow-motion once again, but this time the slow-motion breaks the episode's point of view, since all instances have up to now been from Scully's POV. Perhaps Mulder is having a little "clear" moment, too, but it's a blatant attempt to wring more sentiment out of a scene that was actually quite touching all by itself. The implication from Mulder tucking Scully in is that they don't sleep together, but the implication from the teaser is they do. Presumably, the teaser is meant to exemplify the choice not taken, but with its prominence at the top of the hour and the way Scully pulls down her sweater and the camera then focuses on naked Mulder, it also is meant to inflame. How very juvenile, and what a dishonest way to tell a story.

The production design, as always, is lovely. Scully's vision is carried out beautifully; Daniel's transparent chest, showing the pathways of energy, or "chakras," looks splendid. But to take Scully from diehard rationalist to mystic in one episode is too much to ask viewers to believe. She has been through seven years of paranormal experiences; not only should an entire arc taking a very hard look at this issue been aired several seasons ago, but it should have been done without bringing some old boyfriend into the mix. The dialectic of science and faith in a doctor who is a practicing Catholic and witness to many paranormal incidents is an issue that deserves treatment in and of itself, not just as part of an emotional crisis brought on by the re-emergence of an ex-lover. Oh well, it doesn't matter. In the next episode, "Brand X," Scully is back to her old self.

"America, man! E pluribus, uh..."
—Daryl Weaver

BRAND X

★★1/2

4/16/00. Written by Steven Maeda & Greg Walker. Directed by Kim Manners. Editor: Louise A. Innes.

A riff on THE INSIDER about the consequences of tampering with Mother Nature, even when one is trying to do good with one's tampering. Mulder and Scully are called in to investigate the mysterious death of Morley Tobacco Co. scientist Jim Scobee (Rick Deats). They learn that the Morley had been developing genetically altered tobacco that the scientists hoped would be "safer" for the consumer, but tobacco bugs eating the altered plants also experienced unforeseen genetic changes. Daryl Weaver (Tobin Bell), the only surviving member of a Morley Tobacco Co. test group for the experimental cigarette, has passed on insect eggs to everyone he smokes around.

Not the series' most exciting episode, but, a solid story with interesting characters used well in

Scully comes to the aid of Skinner (Mitch Pileggi) when a tobacco company whistle-blower under his protection turns up dead in "Brand X."



the service of the plot. It's especially nice to have Skinner featured prominently, giving the underused Mitch Pileggi something worth biting into. Dennis Boutsikaras is excellent as the tired, worried Dr. Voss, who finally decides to speak out, while the Morley Tobacco lawyers admonish him about confidentiality. And Tobin Bell as Daryl Weaver is no stock villain; he's sort of spooky-looking, but he's really just an average joe who wants the genetically altered cigarettes.

Director Kim Manners conjures up some splendid images; for instance, the intimidating deep perspective shot of Mulder and Scully seated at a long table across from Dr. Voss and the tobacco company lawyers, or the moment when Weaver first appears as if conjured out of the swirling fog (standing in for cigarette smoke). Production designer Corey Kaplan adds a touch of weirdness through his design of Weaver's apartment building, with its tobacco-colored corridors and dilapidated apartments devoid of everything except the most basic pieces of furniture.

"Brand X" ends on one of the season's most chilling shots. Mulder, thanks to nicotine treatment, has survived the tobacco bug larvae infection, but is now addicted to the drug. With Morley being the Cigarette Smoking Man's own brand, the image of an addicted Mulder is not a pleasant one to contemplate.



Garry Shandling and Tea Leoni tumble into a coffin and begin making out in "Hollywood A.D.," ably written and directed by David Duchovny.

"Agent Scully, if I'm carrying Marilyn Monroe's purse, do you assume that I slept with JFK?"

—Skinner

HOLLYWOOD A.D.

★★1/2

4/30/00. Written and directed by David Duchovny. Editor: Lynne Willingham.

David Duchovny's second effort as writer and director, "Hollywood A.D.," might be regarded as the flip-side of his first episode, "The Unnatural." If "The Unnatural" is about the power of storytelling to reveal the truth of human (and alien) experience, "Hollywood A.D." is about the power of storytelling to distort and trivialize it, when the storytelling falls into the hands of people who want to use it to make a fast buck. The guilty parties, in this instance, are the folks in Hollywood who grind out movies (and, one might extrapolate, television) for a living. Hollywood shows up at the FBI in the person of producer Wayne Federman (played by himself), who wants to make a movie based on Mulder and Scully's experiences. This is not the first time we've had an outsider look at Mulder and Scully—author José Chung wrote about them in a book (in "José Chung's 'From Outer Space'") but at least Chung felt a responsibility to tell the truth as he saw it, and to draw larger, personal conclusions from it. Federman feels no such responsibility, and the end result is a movie of utter vapidness that makes Mulder and Scully look like fools. This travesty,

X-FILES

ROB BOWMAN

The Files auteur on his major discovery, Krycek's Nicholas Lea.

By Miwa Hirai

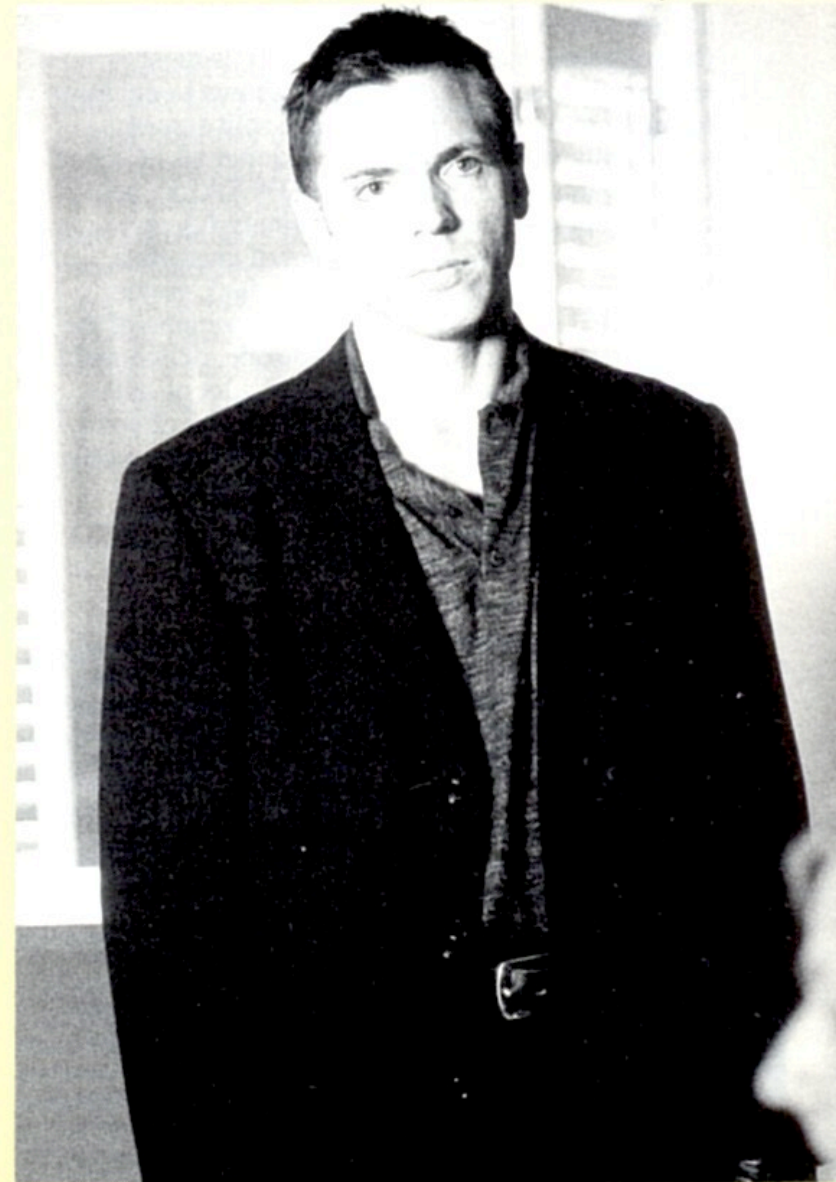
Rob Bowman, director of X-FILES—THE MOVIE, was side-lined most of season seven, directing a movie called RIP-TIDE. He returned only briefly to direct the Scully-centered episode "Orison," (see page 23).

Relaxing in his bungalow on the Fox lot, Bowman noted that he now eschews TV almost exclusively for film work, but THE X-FILES is the exception. "It's very different from other TV shows," he said. "It's a high-level, quality show which spends time and money. Every episode you've got to be a filmmaker, like we make a movie every episode." As to the future of the series, Bowman noted, "I would like the show to be a movie series. And I think it should be."

Bowman established himself as a director for the mythology episodes of THE X-FILES. That led him to the show's first movie, as a feature film director. "The script was very ambitious and originally expensive. We wanted the movie to be very successful although we only had 57 days for actual shooting as David [Duchovny] and Gillian [Anderson] had to go back to Vancouver for Season 5. We couldn't spend much time for prep, either. Moreover it was very difficult to shoot the complicated set. We shot various units throughout 80 days, 40 days for close-ups of monsters, and also shot buildings and facilities in Washington D.C."

The director had to wrap up the post-production duties of the film while he was shooting "The Pine Bluff Variant" in Season 5, which was the last episode he shot in Vancouver. Looking back on the Vancouver days, the first episode which Bowman directed on THE X-FILES was "Genderbender" in Season 1. This was probably the first episode that introduced sexual content into the show. Nicholas Lea, not as the infamous anti-hero Alex Krycek, played the role of a nightclub guy who'd survived an erotic experience with a sex-changing alien.

"At that time I had just finished a Warner Bros job, so I was looking for another thing



Nicholas Lea returned as Krycek in season-ender "Requiem." Bowman discovered Lea in first season's "Genderbender" and cast him as Krycek.

to do. I wanted to make a serious movie or something involving working hard. I like mysterious and spookier things. I just love entertainment. When I saw the X-FILES' pilot, I thought that was exactly what I wanted to do. It's darker, intelligent, and off-beat. It has everything I like. So I told my agent that I wanted to get involved.

"The script of 'Genderbender' was single-spaced description, very complicated. I asked Chris Carter how he would like me to shoot this. He said, 'Why don't you figure it out and let me know?'" Bowman giggled.

"In that episode, Nick's role was just a small one. We just wanted to have a clubguy. I thought Nick had a sort of chilly quality. When the role of Krycek came up, we did a little casting in Vancouver, but I re-

though, leads Mulder and Scully to a lovely conclusion: it is up to them to keep faith in what they believe, and not to let Hollywood take over their hearts and minds. Even with such a satisfying moral, "Hollywood A.D." doesn't work as well as "The Unnatural." Its two major threads, the actual X-file case worked by Mulder and Scully, and the Hollywood satire, don't blend as seamlessly as they should and the episode becomes disjointed.

The actual x-file, involving the Lazarus Bowl, a recording of the voice of Jesus Christ as he raised the dead, is one of the best x-file mysteries all season. In fact, it's so good that it would have made for a satisfying episode without a Hollywood satire appended to it. The story plays both to Scully's religious faith (her visions) and Mulder's belief in the paranormal. Duchovny, who has a gift for creating conversation on screen, gives Mulder and Scully a lot of breathing room; they talk, they joke, they lob points back and forth and you can see where they're going and how they got there. They seem human for the first time in quite a while.

Mulder and Scully's encounter with their big-screen counterparts, Gary Shandling and Tea Leoni (both playing pretentious to the hilt), is most amusing, especially when Scully shows Leoni how to run in high heels. But the triple split screen scene with Mulder, Scully and Skinner all in bubble baths—a tribute to *PILLOW TALK*, no doubt—is more clever than genuinely funny. Skinner, in fact, seems wildly out of character. Duchovny seems to imply, like the faux movie, *THE X-FILES* itself is a Hollywood version of the FBI, which, in virtually every episode, deliberately ignores the reality of the FBI—and a lot of other real-world things—for "dramatic effect," often to the point where *THE X-FILES* itself becomes only a tad less ludicrous than Federman's movie.

"Hollywood A.D." is strong evidence that Duchovny should continue with his writing career.



Scully's vision of Micah Hoffman (Paul Lieber) in "Hollywood A. D.," an X-File on the Lazarus Bowl, a recording of Christ, worthy of its own show.

"Mr. Damphus, I'm Special Agent Scully."

—Scully

"What's so special about you?"

—Daryl Weaver

FIGHT CLUB ★

5/7/00. Written by Chris Carter. Directed by Paul Shapiro. Editor: Heather MacDougall.

Unlike the film, "Fight Club" is not about a split personality, it's about doppelgangers—half sisters who look, sound and act exactly alike. The two women, Betty Templeton and Lulu Pfeiffer (both played by Kathy Griffin) have followed each other around the country for the past 12 years. Whenever they meet up, or are just thinking about each other, havoc erupts—people punch each other out, things explode, etc. Complications ensue when they both fall for the same man, a has-been wrestler named Bert Zupanic (Randall "Tex" Cobb). The episode takes place in Kansas City,

ally had a strong belief that Nick was the right choice. He seemed purely intelligent, having his own agenda. He's a very strong guy, big shoulders, and strong face. I would have 40 to 50 choices but I thought he was the right actor. I think Nick Lea, on screen, is gold. Any time Krycek is in the episode it's better," said Bowman of his *X-FILES* discovery.

"Since then we became friends. We spent a lot of time together on the set. Many great moments. I'm very proud about it because he was a great local Vancouver actor who became a very big part in the show. I wished he was in the movie, although it was different from the storyline of his involvement. I think he is the kind of actor who, given the right role, could be a movie star. Hope he does." Bowman smiled.

As a director, Bowman doesn't stop at mystery stories, the supernatural, the eerie, the grotesque. He shows the underlying layers of human weakness, turmoil, distress, betrayal, and love. The camera work that produces the characteristic aura is uniquely his, and endlessly beautiful.

"The Field Where I Died" in Season 4 is characteristic of his beautiful work. Mulder summons the same souls to be reincarnated together over and over again, and Melissa (Kristen Cloke) and Mulder are soulmates. "It's a tragedy and a romance. I wanted it to be more lyrical. I changed the color palettes to more browns and greens. I wanted to bring an old-fashioned feeling into it because originally the relationships are supposed to be in the Civil War. David was interesting in the story, as it did not begin from government conspiracy, but something deeper, more personal and emotional."

The episode with the most beautiful opening teaser is probably "Memento Mori" in Season 4. Rather than use a lot of movement, the imagery focused on Anderson's narration, as Scully, of the entries in her diary, for an even more realistic effect. The images worked to convey the power of her conviction as she faced her illness, as well as the raw fear she was feeling.

“THE X-FILES is not a science. We're not putting a space shuttle in it. We're acting...It's my job to put the best ideas into the show...New ideas are better.”

—Director Rob Bowman—



Bowman, looking forward to working on the next *X-FILES* movie, fitting in episode chores between his feature assignments.

"It is my favorite episode," said Bowman. "Mulder was the guy who always had an answer, a solution, or speculation. He approached a problem with a question. I remember the first take; David made a choice to be powerless. I suggested to him that he feel inside for the first time that he doesn't know the answer. He doesn't have a solution. I have to say his very first take was the most unique moment because David was looking for the right thing to say, 'Surely I can fix this, you can't fix this.' The scene really did give Mulder a different path through the rest of the episodes. He's worried that no matter what he does, what he finds, who will help him with things if Scully wasn't alive. That's a very unusual characteristic of Mulder.

"Scully is in power, determined. Mulder has been made powerless. He was emotional because it led to finding their relationship—that he is going to be there to help her anyway he can. It's still not romantic,

but they truly love each other on a new level," said the director.

"It's rare find to have two individual actors like David and Gillian. Their talents are very distinct and different from each other. Gillian has extraordinary instinct. At first, I thought Gillian might not understand Scully, but her acting instincts are great. Simple is the most elegant way.

"David is very smart. Either CSM or monsters, he knows how to make it real. That's the most typical thing I can imagine that an actor has to do. It's not going to be easy, but I believe it's a different challenge from acting with another person. He thinks he's really seen what he sees.

"There's no rule. *THE X-FILES* is not a science. We're not putting a space shuttle in it. We're acting. Your point of view of a story is different from mine. It really comes down to what's going to be. My idea doesn't have to be the right one. Gillian's, David's or Chris [Carter]'s idea, or whoever's, might be a better one. It's my job to put all the best ideas into the show, so that really strong pieces are possible. New ideas are better." □

which is located in two states, ha ha. "Fight Club" is meant to be one of X-FILES "comic" episodes (Mark Snow's overbearing, Mickey Mousing score tells us so repeatedly), but it is relentlessly unfunny.

Betty and Lulu are not the only doubles in this episode. Mulder and Scully become involved when they see slides of their doubles (played by their stand-ins, Arlene Pileggi and Steve Kiziak) who nearly killed each other while investigating the episode's initial punch-out between two identically-dressed missionaries). And at the end, we learn that Bert the wrestler has a double, too, so Betty and Lulu no longer have to clash over him. What is the point of all this doubleness? None, as far as can be gleaned from this episode. Scully does all the work in "Fight Club." Mulder becomes so inconsequential to the plot that he's blown into a sewer (thanks to another Betty/Lulu dust-up) and disappears for about a quarter of the episode.

The guest cast is one of the worst ever. Kathy Griffin as Betty and Lulu simply is not up to the task; she can not differentiate Betty and Lulu at all (you can only tell them apart by the color of their clothes) and she reads every line as if she were still on her cancelled sitcom, SUDDENLY SUSAN. Even worse is Randall "Tex" Cobb as Bert Zupanic. His acting is sub-sitcom and he makes for a completely unattractive character in every aspect. Between the two of them, Betty and Lulu and Bert are annoying, ignorant people we simply do not want to spend time with.

"Fight Club" shows more than ever that THE X-FILES is creatively exhausted. More and more, the confirmed eighth season looks to be nothing more than greediness on the part of 1013 and Fox, willing to milk the corpse of this cow dry because, somehow, it keeps pumping out green stuff with dollar signs on it.



Mulder and Scully encounter "Je Souhaite," a 500-year-old genie who dishes out sardonic wisdom on the boundless stupidity of humanity.

conversation with her—especially after she tells him she owes him three wishes. The look of dawning delight on Mulder's face is just right, as he suddenly realizes the world is his to wish for. This is where the heart of the episode lies, with idealistic Mulder asking for world peace, and Jenn telling him he has some ego in wanting her to change the hearts of six billion people. (He does wish for it, and to his horror, everyone on earth disappears. This gives us a priceless bit where Mulder rushes to Skinner's empty office and wishes everyone back while complaining to Jenn, only to find himself screaming in front of Skinner and various FBI brass.) Scully also shines here, when she observes to Mulder that one man shouldn't circumvent with a wish the ways of the world. In the end, Mulder realizes the wisdom of this, and instead of circumventing the ways of the entire world, he merely circumvents the ways of Jenn's world, by wishing her free.

Guest star Paula Sorge, who plays Jenn, the cynical, irony-ridden, completely modern genie, is one of the best guest actors of the season. Part of her charm is simply the way she looks: dressed all in black, coiffed with a black pageboy, she looks like she belongs in a New York fashion magazine's editorial offices; this is not your typical genie in pantaloons, vest and pointy shoes. Jenn has seen it all when it comes to human behavior; she has no more illusions left, and Sorge delivers her mocking lines with snap, bite and wonderful dark humor.

"It's not unreasonable. It's just a matter of reducing your vision."

—FBI Auditor Chesty

REQUIEM

★★

5/16/00. Written by Chris Carter. Directed by Kim Manners. Editor: Heather MacDougall.

"Requiem" is the best mytharc episode and season finale in several years. But that's not saying much, considering the unholy mess the mytharc has become. And it ends on one of the most egregious missteps yet in the X-FILES mythology, which is saying much, because there have been so many.

Mulder and Scully travel to Bellfleur, Oregon, the site of the pilot episode. A dying Cigarette Smoking Man wants a crashed alien ship before it can "rebuild itself" and depart, to serve as the foundation of a new conspiracy to battle aliens. He orders Marita Covarrubias (Laurie Holden)—remember her?—to spring Krycek (Nicholas Lea)—remember him?—from a Tunisian prison. Mulder disappears aboard the repaired ship. Back in D.C., Scully, hospitalized, tells a Skinner, still devastated from the loss of Mulder, that she's pregnant.

There is also the question of the father. An alien baby is cheesy beyond all redemption. Could the CSM have been up to something really nasty when an unconscious Scully was in his clutches during "En Ami"? The most likely possibility is

Mulder, thanks to the teaser of "All Things." Chris Carter said in an interview that "Requiem" would refer back to "All Things," so naturally Mulder is now the number one Daddy candidate.

Mulder's story is also bungled somewhat; this is the fallout to no follow-up from "Closure." Since "Requiem" takes us back to Bellfleur, we can't help but compare the obsessed, passionate Mulder of the pilot—to the apathetic Mulder we see now. He seems to be doing his find-the-aliens thing by rote. One might construe that Mulder is suffering depression following the end of his quest, but the show itself has done nothing to suggest anything so logical. Any emotion he shows is focused not on aliens, but on Scully (but that's bungled, too). And the moment that should have been the climax of the season (now that the search for Samantha has ended) is presented far too casually. There is one superb idea here: that Mulder chooses, like Richard Dreyfuss in CLOSE ENCOUNTERS (or Bull in the series finale of NIGHT COURT!) to go with the aliens. But again, Mulder makes that choice with a singular lack of affect. There's no foreshadowing of the abduction, no pull for him towards the forest, no suspense, no terror, no exultation.

The real fun of "Requiem"—and the only hope of even a semi-decent eighth season—comes courtesy of the long-awaited return of the always-intense, always-watchable Nicholas Lea as Krycek, the series' most underused character. And Laurie Holden, as Marita Covarrubias, shows unexpected potential to turn into someone intriguing. Marita's and Krycek's offer to team up with Mulder and Scully is a bonafide and welcome surprise; it may very well create genuine tension and conflict next season. Nicholas Lea, as Krycek, energizes every scene he's in, and maybe, if Krycek plays a prominent role next season, we may also finally get that "all about Krycek" episode the show has needed for so long. The demise of the Cigarette Smoking Man, pushed, wheelchair and all, down the stairs by Krycek a la Richard Widmark in KISS OF DEATH, is definitely a good idea. The Cigarette Smoking Man was once one of the great television villains, but he's been toothless for far too long. Unfortunately, it's another one of those "is he or isn't he" kinds of deaths so beloved by THE X-FILES. Kudos, though, for the CSM's refusal to give up smoking (the cigarette in the tracheotomy tube is right out of DEAD AGAIN) and for his taste in buxom blonde nurses; he's a horny old devil right to the end.

If only next season could be the Alex and Marita show; these two lusty, conniving rogues would inject a jolt of electricity, mischievousness and sly fun into a exhausted show that's been running on fumes for far too long. They sure would be a lot more entertaining to watch than Scully giving birth to a baby. Unless it was Rosemary's baby. Maybe the CSM is the devil after all.

Nicholas Lea and Laurie Holden join Mulder and Skinner in "Requiem," and just might end-up anchoring the show next year when it returns?



Mulder pops his head out of the sewer in "Fight Club," a supposedly antic episode written by Chris Carter that fails to be even mildly amusing.

"Boink!"

—Mulder, doing I DREAM OF JEANNIE.

JE SOUHAITE

★★1/2

5/14/00. Written and directed by Vince Gilligan. Editor: Louise A. Innes.

X-FILES writer Vince Gilligan makes his directing debut with "Je Souhaite," the season's penultimate episode. You'd think we'd get an hour of mytharc at this point; instead, we get whimsy involving 500-year-old genie Jenn (Paula Sorge) granting wishes and dishing out sardonic observations about the boundless stupidity of humanity.

"Je Souhaite" would have worked better if it had consisted of a half-hour encounter between Mulder, Scully and Jenn, and dropped the guest cast of stereotypic poor Southerners.

The episode picks up only with Mulder and Jenn interacting—he's one of the few people she's encountered who can hold his own in a



From The X-Files To Cervantes

TILT

By Dan Persons

At the end of its fifth season, THE X-FILES switched production base, moving from Vancouver, Canada to Los Angeles, California. This allowed David Duchovny to spend more time with wife Téa, but also stranded the seasoned crew who, over the course of five years, had succeeded in making the show one of the most groundbreaking productions in television. So what did the spurned filmmakers do? They found other jobs, of course—this is Vancouver, not Siberia. Still, some on the lower end of the production scale dreamed of finer things.

That included former X-FILES P.A. Lance Peverley, who found inspiration in a script he had written while at the Vancouver Film School. "I'd always been intrigued by the Don Quixote character," said Peverley. "I'd seen MAN OF LA MANCHA when I was in high school, things like that. But it wasn't until I was working on THE X-FILES as a production assistant that the character really took hold. I did a major re-write on the script, imagining [Lone Gunman] Tom Braidwood playing the Sancho Panza character. I was working the downtown, east side of Vancouver—my job was basically sweeping up cigarette butts, holding traffic; I was right at the bottom of the list as far as THE X-FILES hierarchy was concerned. But I spent a lot of time in the streets, coming across the locals, some of the homeless, some of the psychiatric patients that had been released. The story just became much more real to me. Once I pictured Tom Braidwood as my lead character, it all came together very nicely. It's a comedy, but based on a lot of reality."

The resulting script, TILT,

The Vancouver crew found some spare time on their hands.



THE X-FILES Emmy-winning sound mixer Michael Williamson goes over script revisions on location with Frohike's Tom Braidwood during the filming of TILT.

told the story of a down-at-the-heels salesman named Sam Penzer, who comes to the aid of a derelict and finds himself immersed in the man's delusions of knights and noble quests. With this polished scenario in hand, Peverley joined forces with former X-FILES trainee, assistant director Patrick Stark, who took on the role of producer, and art department driver Barry Shelton, who became executive producer. Together, they dared to approach the man who had started out as THE X-FILES assistant director but had significantly raised his public profile with his portrayal of the Scully-obsessed Lone Gunman Frohike. "Patrick Stark called me and said that he and a friend

were doing a little film and would I like to be involved and do some acting?" remembered Tom Braidwood. "I said, 'Okay, sounds good.' I can't remember what I was doing at the time, I was a little busy. I probably didn't think about it much until I got the script and realized I was the star."

Producer Patrick Stark remembers that minor oversight. "He had some time to think about it. It wasn't until months later that we actually sat down and went over the script, had a cast read-through, that kind of thing. He liked the script and liked the thought of the other people involved with it. We had [X-FILES alumni] Michael Williamson as the sound mixer

and Marty McInally as the director of photography, so at least we'd make everything look good and sound good. It wouldn't be a student film."

With a pro crew and a prospective, 35 minute running time, all the TILT partners had to do was find the time to make the thing. Weekends, they decided, would do. The production schedule would be significantly telescoped, but not without some significant advantages. "Because we've shot it over the period of a year," said Stark, "as we moved along it sort of gained momentum with the number of people becoming involved, the people wanting to help. Things we never thought we'd have—like motion-control for visual effects, and crane shots—sort of came after the fact. People would offer us these services and we'd go, 'Well, how can we apply this to the film?' and went from there."

"We always knew we wanted to shoot on 35 [mm film]. I've been collecting 35mm film in my fridge for a long time. Little short-ends, you know, ends of the roll that were donated to me. I got a second fridge to put the short-ends in—there was no question that we were going to shoot 35 when it came to making the film. I wanted to get that stuff out of my fridge."

Said Peverley, "Ninety-nine percent of the movie takes place in one night, so continuity was one of those things where I had to go, 'Okay, months have passed, hair lengths have changed, characters that were being developed in one scene we're now trying to approach with the same mood.' It hasn't been extremely easy, but at the same time we've got some of the best [crewmembers] in the business. Patrick and I were basically the most junior people on the set,



The Lone Gunman stretches his acting chops, playing Sancho Panza to John R. Taylor's Quixote in a modern-day adaptation of Cervantes' fantasy classic.

even though we were producer and director. Somebody like Tom comes in, and even when it's six months later, it's still like it's ten seconds later in time as far as the story is concerned. I'm shocked when I look at the dailies and he's walking the same way, his expressions are the same. There's no [conscious] skill that could achieve this—we're just doing very well with continuity.

"The other side of this is that I'm figuring that if the audience notices that the hair of the guy in the back of the room has grown a quarter of an inch, I guess I sort of lost them anyway."

Viewers may not be lost to TILT's extended shooting schedule, but that didn't mean more tangible aspects of the production were immune from the

strictures of time. Key amongst them: a building which figured prominently in the film's climax. Said Stark, "There's a landmark in Vancouver, a very old building—old for Vancouver, which is like 100 years—that we had for our 'windmill.' It's an old building with a nice, green copper dome to it that we played a lot in the back of our shots, leading up to this big day that we have yet to shoot. We had approval for the location, everything seemed to be fine, but it took us longer to shoot the film than we expected. So at the time we were ready to shoot at that location, they said, 'Oh, we're sorry, we've leased out offices in the building, and they don't want anything to do with the filming.'

"So what are we going to

"I've been collecting 35mm film in my fridge," said producer Stark. "There was no question that we were going to shoot 35. I wanted to get that stuff out of my fridge."

do? We've played this particular landmark in the background of many shots, it's the building that we wanted to play as the windmill—in other people's minds, they could see how a crazy person could see that it's a dragon. But we lost the location; we had to improvise. We went to a sugar refinery where there are huge silos. We decided to play the silos as the dragons. It's not quite as easy a sell: we're going to have to use a visual effect, a very subtle visual effect, to show the insane, Don Quixote character's POV. But it all turned out for the best. In the location that we wanted originally, we'd have to have a police lock-up, a pedestrian lock-up. It's right in the middle of Vancouver, it's right on the edge of the east end, which is a very impoverished, very sensitive area. We've moved it to an industrial area where we can shoot all night long, where we don't need any lock-up. It's actually made everything much easier, so there you go."

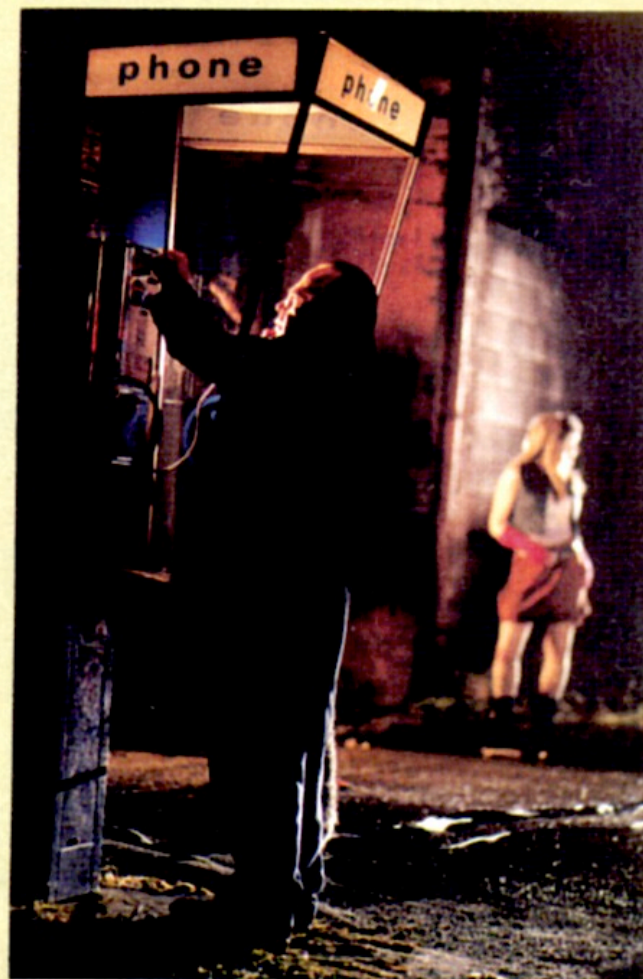
That last, major sequence was scheduled to shoot in May. Deciding to go for broke, all involved prepped for a sequence the likes of which rarely finds its way into a "weekend project" type of film. "It's huge," said Stark of the finale. "We've got 60 extras at the base of the silo at the sugar refinery. We've got a stunt guy on top of one of the silos, about 150 feet. And we've got a helicopter with a camera mounted on it doing a crazy shot around him—we're actually bringing in a first assistant director for that, a really experienced one; we definitely don't want to be responsible for that. Safety's a main issue, we don't want to do anything nuts for the sake of a shot. We've got a parade coordinator; we've got Jacob Rupp, who does a lot of the major stunt work in Vancouver. David

Duchovny's stunt double from Vancouver's X-FILES is also a coordinator. They're all making it a safe shoot, but also selling the shot so that it looks good."

Said Peverley, "This was the day that was never planned for in the writing stage, when I was writing the quick-and-dirty, scenes-that-we-could-shoot-cheap script. Patrick said to me, 'By the way, if we were to get a helicopter, could you use it?' I was actually stunned, 'Y-you know...sure, if that were to happen...' He phoned back an hour later and said, 'We've got a helicopter.' We've got the helicopter, we've got a Wescam, which is a rock-steady camera mount. [Stark] said, 'Of course, it's going to be the scene on the tower?' I said, 'You betcha.' When the guy's on the top of the tower, if we can see him from an aerial viewpoint, with the camera going out into the night...wow!

"That's the stuff for us," Peverley summed up. "That's what this film's turned into." □

Braidwood as Sam Penzer, Cervantes X-FILES style, filmed on Vancouver locations when the show went to LA.



Executive producer Barry Shelton, producer and 1st assistant director Patrick Stark and writer/director Lance Peverley (r), FILES alums making a short film.



WITCHBLADE

Top Cow's popular superheroine airs on TNT in August, starring Yancy Butler.

By Dan Scapperotti

Following in the footsteps of such directors as Richard Donner, Tim Burton and Jim Wynorski, Ralph Hemecker has delved into the realm of comic book heroes with his adaptation of Top Cow's WITCHBLADE. Much like the monster appropriating the name of his maker in FRANKENSTEIN, NYPD detective Sara Pezzini has been tagged outside the comic pages by fans and merchandisers as Witchblade, actually the name of an ancient weapon she wields. TNT premieres their TV movie special August 28.

While investigating a mobster gathering, Pezzini encounters the Witchblade, a living artifact that sends out its tendrils

The fully armored Pezzini on Top Cow's erotically charged comic, an aspect skirted by the TV movie.



Butler as Pezzini, learning the history of the Witchblade, a mystical bracelet that provides her with body armor and other super powers to fight crime.

to embrace the beautiful young cop. Immediately, she and the relic are one! Shrinking to the size of a bracelet, the Witchblade is always with her and can transform into a formidable weapon. Yancy Butler stars as super heroine, Sara Pezzini.

Hemecker has directed fantasy and horror before, including "Schizogeny" the killer tree episode of THE X-FILES, "Cabin the Woods" and "Romeo and Juliet" two entries in the short lived THE KINDRED series and a trio of MILLENNIUM shows, "Well-worn Lock," "The Curse of Frank Black" and "Exegesis."

"I've done a lot of stuff that takes place in the supernatural realm," said Hemecker. "I find that interesting. I think I gravitate to things that are out of the ordinary that skew towards the intense side. On MILLENNIUM and X-FILES, we shot a lot at night. It was fun to do, the ac-

tors were great and Chris Carter is a really creative and smart guy."

When Hemecker was tapped to direct WITCHBLADE, he met with Marc Silvestri and other members of the Top Cow group. He proceeded to pick the brains behind the comic book that has spawned 40 issues. "I wanted to get the DNA of the comic book," he said. "I wanted to get that into the TV show because it's kind of tricky to adapt something that happens in a pure two dimensional realm into a TV show or film. A lot of the movie is taken from elements from the first eight issues of the comic. We added some things and took away some things so we could give it a clean dramatic arc because obviously there is a lot more going on in those eight issues than we could possibly deal with in 90 minutes worth of TV.

"The character, Sara Pezzini,

is essentially the same. She's tough, she's vulnerable, but she tries not to show it. Very courageous. She's cool and funny and beautiful. The challenge was adapting the comic book, the time and space available and then trying to conceptualize what we were going to do. There were also the practical challenges of physically executing the show on a tight schedule and a tight budget."

While fans of the comic will be clued into the essence of both Sara and the artifact, Hemecker is counting on an air of mystery for the less informed. "I don't want to over dialogue the Witchblade," he said, "because part of the allure of the show is actually the mystery and unraveling of what it is and what it does. It's a sentient gauntlet. It's the glove that shape shifts. Sometimes it's a bracelet, sometimes it's an armored glove that was supposedly worn by Joan of Arc. It can transform into a sword and it's got certain capabilities and it gives Sarah Pezzini certain special abilities. It's pretty similar to the comic. It makes her into a little bit of a superhuman fighter. She has second sight, meaning she can flash on things that may happen in the future and some things that did happen in the past."

Wealthy industrialist Kenneth Irons and his right-hand man, the mysterious Ian Nottingham, want to control the power of the ancient Witchblade, but realize it can only be used by a woman. When the ancient relic chooses NYPD cop Sara Pezzini, the pair decide to



Yancy Butler as New York detective Sara Pezzini, armed with the WITCHBLADE. TNT airs the hotly anticipated TV-movie, a backdoor series pilot, on August 28.

control her and thus the weapon. Hemecker doesn't see Irons as the villain. Instead Sara's main nemesis in the film is the brutal killer, Gallo. "She's up against a very ruthless, very smart, very unpredictable killer as well as her encounter with the Witchblade," said the director. "She is also faced with trying to figure out what this is and deal with the people who are associated with that, who are Irons and Nottingham. She's dealing with a lot of different things as well as some emotions from her best friend recently being killed."

The genesis of the Witchblade is shrouded in mystery in the comics, however the film hints at those origins. "We show you some images of where the Witchblade came from and how it possibly evolved, but it's not specifically stated."

Actress Yancy Butler was

cast as Pezzini, whose life is radically changed when she encounters the Witchblade. "Yancy is the ideal Sara Pezzini," said Hemecker of his star. "She's got a real emotional range. She's got a strong screen presence. She's very physical which in a role like this is invaluable because she's got to do a lot of running, fighting, punching, kicking and gun firing. It's a rough and tumble role. It's a combination of acting ability and physical prowess and that's very rare. And she's very beautiful."

David Chokachi plays Jake McCarty, a new cop on the force from San Diego. Jake is secretly in love with Sara and is overly protective of the detective. He's also an ex-surfer, although only Sara is privy to that part of his life. The enigmatic Ian Nottingham is played by Eric Etebari. "He's a very mysteri-

“The interesting thing about WITCHBLADE is that it's hard to put in a box,” said Hemecker. “...It's a cross genre piece. It's unique. It's a bold move for television.”

ous dark knight,” Hemecker explained. “He could be good or bad we don't know. There is a lot of ambiguity in this show and a lot of mystery.”

Hemecker was also impressed with Anthony Cistaro, who is cast as Kenneth Irons. “He is a really great actor,” he said. “It was a pleasure to work with him. He's perfect for the role because he has a real elegance and a very subtle menace.”

Rounding out the cast is William Lee, who plays Sara's partner, detective Daniel Woo, and Conrad Dunn as the vicious Craig Gallo. “He's very, very frightening and he's funny at the same time,” Hemecker said of Dunn.

The film began its six-week shoot last February in Toronto, which doubled for New York City. Sidelineing any Canadian effects houses, the producers hired Los Angeles based Look Effects to furnish the films CGI shots. The main effects shots will involve the transformations of the Witchblade itself from bracelet to weapon and the various other manifestations of the arcane device.

“We do a fair amount of CGI stuff,” said Hemecker. “Beside the Witchblade itself, there are things where time slows down

and you can actually see bullets fly through the air and bullets getting deflected. Effects supervisor Max Ivans was able to pull off minor miracles for us. In a simplistic way it's like Excalibur meets a New York City cop. Obviously it's not a sword it's an armored gauntlet, an armored glove but in the purist terms that's the story.”

Following the time-honored tradition of having an unconsummated sexual tension between the heroine and male members of the cast, WITCHBLADE give Sara Pezzini more than her share. “There are a lot of things that aren't fully explained,” said Hemecker. “She's very close to her partner, Daniel Woo, and there is a lot of sexual tension between her and Nottingham, as there is between her and Irons. There's a lot going on, but nothing comes to fruition in the show.”

After an intense apprenticeship with Bob and Harvey Weinstein in the New York office's of Miramax Films, Hemecker entered the filmmaker ranks by making commercials. His first gig in the director's chair was on a 30 second spot for the Long Island Compact Disc store. From there, he segued into television pilots. His first feature, DOUBLE

Butler as Pezzini learns that the Witchblade once gave power to Saint Joan of Arc. X-FILES director Ralph Hemecker imbues the pilot with a sense of realism.



WITCHBLADE

TOP COW COMICS

Would-be media moguls, ranked third behind DC and Marvel.

By Dan Scapperotti

Top Cow's *Witchblade* has won the comic industry's top female character award for two years running. Seven years ago, Marc Silvestri founded Top Cow, which has grown into the third largest supplier of comics right behind industry icons Marvel and DC Comics. Among the company's stable of comics is *Spirit of the Doll*, *Rising Stars* and the upcoming *Aphrodite 9*. Chris Morgan is presently writing the screenplay for another Top Cow comic, *THE DARKNESS*, planned as a feature from Columbia Pictures and another female heroine book, *Fathom*, is being considered by Fox.

Several years ago, Silvestri and company decided the time was right to reintroduce the female superhero. Along with



Silvestri, Top Cow founder, wedding comics and realism with an eye toward movies and television.

David Wohl, President of Creative Affairs, Brian Haberlin and Michael Turner, Silvestri created the Pezzini and *Witchblade* characters. "This actually came out before *XENA* did," said Silvestri. "We thought it was a great time to hit the market with a strong female lead but base her in reality which kind of bucked the trend in comics. In fact most of the things that we publish at Top Cow have a strong base in reality and we launch the elements of the fantastic from that so there is something there for everyone to relate to whether you're into superheroes or not.

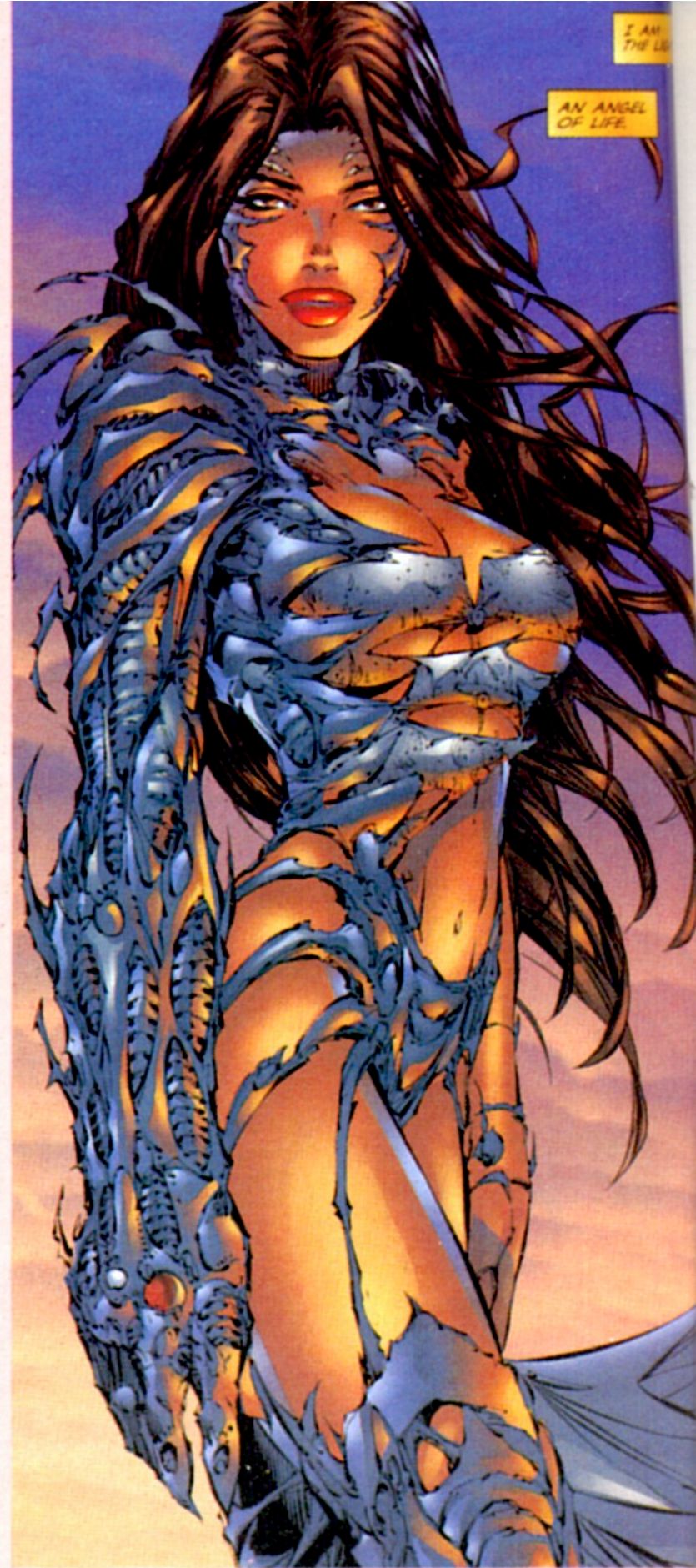
"Pezzini can't just go around like Bat-

man and tie up the bad guys and leave them on the steps of City Hall. It doesn't work that way in real life. She has something to contend with called due process of the law. She's got to make sure these criminals are tried. She's not a vigilante, she's a detective, she has a moral compass. She's a good person. How does she deal with it? That's the intriguing thing that we've put not only into *Witchblade*, but everything we do here at Top Cow. I want to have that extra layer of depth in everything we do and I think that's where our success comes from."

Unlike most comics the title does not refer to the hero as one might expect. Instead, the *Witchblade* is a strange arcane device that Sara has absorbed into her being which enables the wearer to wield incredible power. "We did that on purpose," said Silvestri. "We wanted to put people off guard. With Superman and Batman it's always the name of the character. We thought it would be cool if the name of the book is the name of the sentient thing that has attached itself to Sara. It's actually a character itself."

While Silvestri has drawn more comics than he cares to remember, his goals were never limited to the comic pages. His vision was to take a page from Disney and control his characters, marketing them to other outlets. "We were always careful from day one," said Silvestri about licensing the movie rights to the character. "We didn't want to do anything campy. I love *XENA* and *HERCULES*, but that's not what we wanted. We wanted to do something that nobody else has ever done before and that was to take this, for lack of a better term, superhero genre and treat it with respect. We wanted it to have a gritty look and feeling and this is how it turned out. It's kind of like *THE X-FILES* Meets *NYPD BLUE*. You put that into this genre and you're going to shock a lot of people. They're going to be pretty surprised when they see it. It's not standard primary color, strange angled campy fair that they've seen in the past with superheroes. This is a gritty, realistic show. It's a detective show. It's a cops show."

The three-year germination period for *WITCHBLADE* was long by TV standards. When they began pitching the project Sil-



The comic, created for Top Cow by Marc Silvestri, David Wohl, Brian Haberlin and Michael Turner, art by Turner and colorist Jonathan D. Smith.

vestri teamed up with Dan Halstead of Illusion Pictures because, according to Silvestri, Halstead was one of the few people who got his concept. Eventually, TNT picked up the project with Warner Bros. footing the bill. While the cable network sidesteps the issue of the feature as harbinger of a future series, Silvestri freely admits *WITCHBLADE* is a pilot.

The popular *Witchblade* image is of a nude Sara entwined by the artifact whose metallic tendrils strategically cover portions of the beautiful detective. That vision is misleading and something you won't see in the feature film. "That's for the comic book audience," Silvestri admitted. "She's a strong, sexy woman who is kind of uncomfortable when the thing chooses to wrap itself around her like that. Quite frankly it's not a bad thing to have someone who looks like that on the cover of a comic book. Just ask *Sports Illustrated* what they think of their swimsuit issue." □

WITCHBLADE

YANCY BUTLER

From fembot to comic book crusader.

EDGE (a.k.a. AMERICAN DRAGONS), was a low budget actioner lensed in Vancouver which was doubling for New York City. The film starred Michael Biehn and Korean Joong Hoon-Park as a pair of cops investigating a seeming turf war between the Mafia and Yakuza in Seoul, Korea.

One of Hemecker's strangest assignments and, consequently, one of the more challenging was the Fox TV movie **BLADE SQUAD**. "It was about cops on roller blades with jet packs," he explained. "We shot it around Los Angeles. It was a tough subject to make feel realistic and a hard world to create. It was Cyberpunk, futuristic. A **BLADE RUNNER** world on a TV movie budget. It was tricky."

Another TV pilot which failed to make the cut at Fox was Morgan and Wong's **THE WONDER CABINET**, the story of a team of scientists that investigates biological anomalies. "Each is a misfit in their own way," said Hemecker. "It was a cool concept. The center piece of the show takes place in a museum where this sort of mad scientist has all these biological anomalies. There is actually a place in LA that is similar, that the Wonder Cabinet was based on."

What makes **WITCHBLADE** stand out from the ranks of other action shows that clutter the airways? "It's a supernatural action show," Hemecker explained. "The action has a special flavor on this show and a lot of that is driven by what the Witchblade enables Sara to do. She can basically move quicker through time so to her perspective on everything seems to slow down a great deal. It's intense without being overly graphic. You don't see blood splattering, but by the end of a sequence you still say Wow! It definitely has a heavy dose of action. The interesting thing about **WITCHBLADE** is that it's hard to put it in a box and you can categorize it in different ways but it definitely has supernatural elements and it definitely has very realistic cop elements and it's got a bunch of action. It's a cross genre piece. It's unique. It's a bold move for television." □

By Dan Scapperotti

WITCHBLADE, aka New York cop Sara Pezzini, is played by Yancy Butler, who has done a profusion of genre roles since starring as the titular robot in 1992's short-lived series **MANN AND MACHINE**. Butler has been featured on HBO's **TALES FROM THE CRYPT** and **PERVERSIONS OF SCIENCE**, and independent low-budgeters like **RAVAGER** (1997), about the crew of a crashed spaceship decimated by a cache of biological weapons, and **DOOMSDAY MAN** (1999) about general warfare. "I don't have an affinity for science fiction or fantasy and I don't know why I'm in so many," said Butler, the daughter of Joe Butler, the lead singer for Lovin' Spoonful. "I'm not adverse to it at all. I don't have a thing for action pictures. They just seem to follow me wherever I go. No complaints here. It's lucrative and fun."

When she read the script for **WITCHBLADE**, she was intrigued but found she was up against a couple of other actresses for the Pezzini role. After meeting with director Ralph Hemecker and hearing his vision for the character, Butler realized that this was a role she wanted. Fortunately, the director was impressed with Butler's combination of acting talents, beauty and physical prowess which was required to bring the Pezzini character to life.

"I love Ralph," said Butler. "He took something that really may not have come off as plausible and made it realistic. He took this vision and really



Butler in cop mode, the robot star of TV's short-lived **MANN AND MACHINE** and the daughter of Joe Butler, lead singer of the Lovin' Spoonful.

shaped it into something wonderful. He's a treat to work with on a grueling schedule."

Butler found the role of Pezzini a strong female lead that she could embrace. "I was attracted to her vulnerability and yet her strength," said the actress. "I do play her in the vein of a sort of genre femme fatale, but a very realistic one in what could have possibly been portrayed too broadly in a very unrealistic situation. I think that what gives it credibility and what gives it life and, in fact, humor whenever allowed and very much needed is the realistic portrayal of how weird this Witchblade thing is. Sara has a kind of duality to the way she reacts to different situations. Whatever

suits her best, or not, because she doesn't always make the best decisions."

Although the Witchblade chooses only women to wield its power, it has a mind and agenda of its own and since it is one with its female host she must alternately embrace or try and reject the desires of the Witchblade. "It's very Taoistic," said Butler. "She doesn't know how to use it, she doesn't know what to do, she doesn't know what it is, she doesn't really remember how she got it on her wrist. So it's almost this burden for her in the beginning and at some point one would hope that she learns how to utilize it so it works for her let alone stand idle or work against her. It is in fact a nemesis unto itself."

"In the film it begins as a bracelet, which is similar to what it is in the comic. It's something that I would even wear. It's a bracelet with a sort of oval eye shape and then it turns into a gauntlet.

For the most part when you see this thing in action it is a gauntlet, except toward the end it does turn into a full suit of armor. One of the props did have a sword come out of it and the others didn't. It has talons and it has jewels. It was quite elaborate, it was quite fun. It was hard to wear. There was a lot of skin pinching, but they did a fantastic job to make it as comfortable as possible and as aesthetically pleasing as possible."

Butler took **WITCHBLADE**'s extensive action sequences in stride. I like to do my own stunts, without getting crazy," she said. "I liken it to being a child and being invited to the sandbox, but not being able to play. It was extremely physically challenging." □

URBAN LEGEND II: FINAL CUT

Another stab at the 'teen horror genre.

By Paul Wardle

When *URBAN LEGEND* was released in 1998, it turned out to be a surprise hit for Sony. Surprise, because it utilized a first-time director, and a cast that, while it featured many young veterans of the business, had no boxoffice stars attached. When it came time for a sequel, the decision was made to use another first-time director, a completely new cast of young actors, and a new setting for the mythical-style killings.

John Ottman feeds off the energy of the youthful cast, and is excited to be making his directorial debut in the horror/suspense genre. Ottman served a dual role as film editor and composer for the taut thrillers *THE USUAL SUSPECTS* and Stephen King's *APT PUPIL*. His music can also be found in the scores of *HALLOWEEN: H20*, *THE CABLE GUY*, *INCOGNITO*, and the comic book-adapted *X-MEN* movie.

Taking a rare break to chat about his work on *URBAN LEGENDS 2: FINAL CUT*, Ottman was getting ready to film a scene at an amusement ride in Ontario Place, a family attraction on Toronto's western waterfront. There is a nip in the pleasant December weather as Ottman discussed the project that has given him his first stab at directing a feature film. Co-

lumbia Pictures opens their horror sequel September 15.

Referring to the energy of his cast, Ottman began by noting, "They're not jaded actors, so practically every actor has done their own stunt in this film, often insisting upon it. Nothing is beneath them."

The actors are so willing to put themselves at risk, in fact, that Ottman and his crew find themselves having to convince them of the dangers and offer to replace them with stunt people. "It got to a point," Ottman explained, "where last night we were in this very nebulous situation. The stunt guy said the [projected stunt] could possibly be unsafe."

Jennifer Morrison, who has the largest part in the film, plays Amy, a film student who ends



Amy (Jennifer Morrison), Graham (Joseph Lawrence) and Trevor (Matthew Davis), film students making a thesis on urban legends as the bodies pile up.

up trying to stop more urban legend-type murders from taking place. Morrison successfully executed many of her own stunt shots, with no small worry from Ottman and his crew. "I worry a lot, because [Jennifer] was doing one stunt where she wasn't supposed to fall, but she did, and hurt her knees pretty badly. The schedule for that same night had her running through the forest and down an incline. She was still quite sore [from her fall] and I kept apologizing after every take."

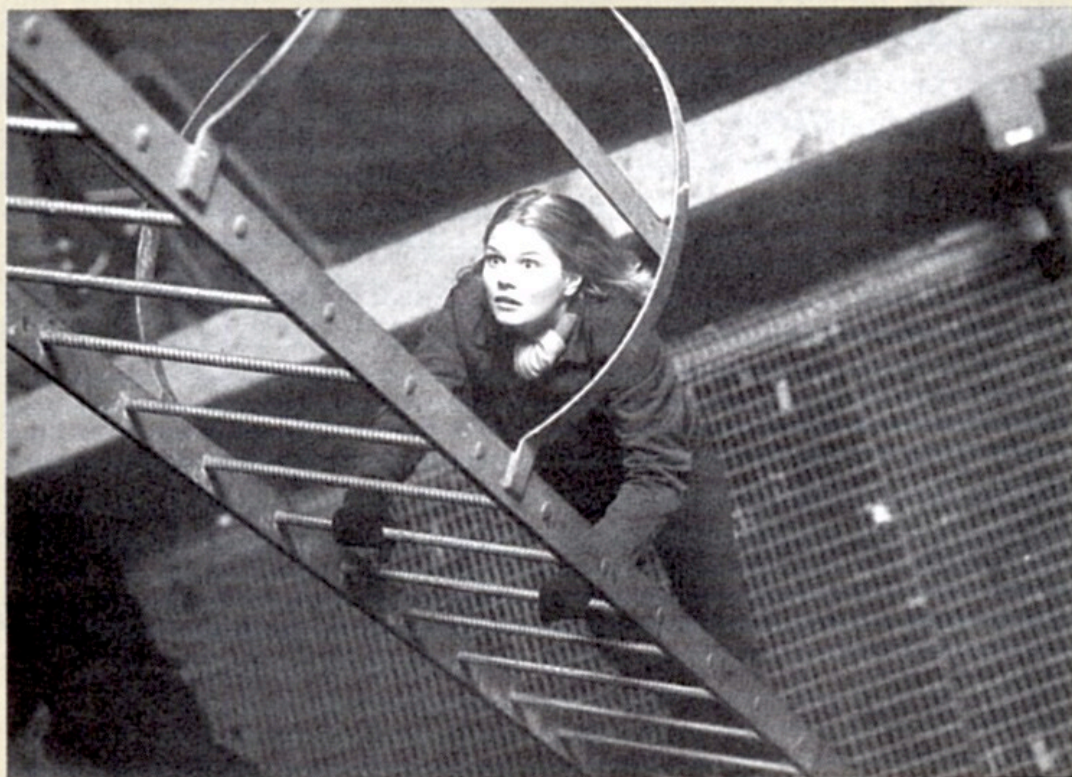
In his eight-year career, John Ottman holds the distinction of being the only person in at least the last 40 years to edit and score the same film. "Phoenix Pictures saw me build something from the ground up on *APT PUPIL*. They saw me as a consummate

filmmaker, in a way, and then I scored a movie for them called *LAKE PLACID*. Everyone has known for years that the reason I got into this mess in the first place was to direct. They whipped out a script and said, 'How about this?' At first, I said I couldn't do a horror film as my first movie, but I thought more about it, read the script, and there was something different enough about this that maybe I could put my mark on it."

Ottman joked that the real reason to hire a new director was because he worked cheaply. "I was sort of a bargain, because they knew me already, and I had a relationship with these people. They trusted me," he said.

Part of this trust that Phoenix Pictures, and, by association, Columbia Pictures had in Ottman relied on his desire to make a film vastly different from its predecessor. "I wanted it to be more of a thriller in nature," Ottman explained, "more Hitchcockian, as opposed to straight horror. I wanted to make it as intelligent as I could, while at the same time not alienating the audience that wants horror. I wanted to widen [its appeal] just enough where maybe some adults might get a kick out of it, too. There's a lot of homages to classic films that will perhaps go over the heads of some of the younger [viewers], but maybe the older audi-

Morrison flees the masked killer plaguing the film crew in the sequel, directed by John Ottman, a composer and film editor making his feature directing debut.





CUTTING EDGE MAKEUPS

From Lon Chaney to horror slasher.

By Paul Wardle

At 71, Irene Kent shows no signs of slowing down. Dressed casually, but carrying herself with a quiet dignity, she is a comforting presence on the set of *URBAN LEGENDS 2: THE FINAL CUT*, filming in Toronto in the fall of 1999. One of her proteges is Leslie Seibert, who was in charge of facial makeup for the first *URBAN LEGEND*. The reigning godmother of the Toronto movie makeup scene, Kent has been working in the business since 1952. She fancies herself as not just a makeup artist, but a kind of filmmaker. On the set of *URBAN LEGENDS 2*, there is little in the way of special effects that don't have to do with makeup. Severed heads and limbs, cuts, wounds and various gory sequences have to look real, and Kent had a lot of experience from her long career in the makeup industry. So many U.S. films and commercials are shot in and around Toronto, that Kent has become a force in Hollywood films without ever leaving Canada. She provides an interesting overview of how movie, stage and TV makeup has changed since her career began, and her own role in that change.

Kent began in the makeup department at The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. Kent had done stage makeup, and the first regular television series she worked on was a series of 39 episodes of *LAST OF THE MOHICANS*, starring Lon Chaney Jr. whom she recalled as a sweet man, and a good actor, who unfortunately had to contend with unfavorable comparisons to his father, silent screen legend Lon



Jessica Cauffiel gets victimized. Toronto makeup supervisor, veteran Irene Kent, 71, goes back to the days of Lon Chaney, Jr.

Chaney Sr. Kent acknowledged that the younger Chaney had a drinking problem, but that he always delivered the goods as an actor, and claims that she learned a lot from him. She had also worked closely with a young Norman Jewison, who worked extensively in Canadian TV before achieving great acclaim as a film director in Hollywood.

The dangerous chemicals often used in stage makeup for the first half of the 20th century was injurious to many actors. "We used greasepaint wrapped in paper." Kent revealed of her stage days. "The smell could be rancid, so the shelf life wasn't very long. The products in film and TV makeup have become more sophisticated. They're finer, because the film is better. The industry has grown so much.

"When you get into the prosthetic side, it changes so rapidly," Kent continued, "that Dick Smith doesn't do a book.

He does videotapes. By the time he prints a book, there's a better product out. In the old days, you only had 'out-of-kit' makeup, your waxes, which we still use, because it's fast, and you can make a very realistic cut, wound, or burn."

Kent's work on *URBAN LEGEND 2* utilizes her vast experience to expedite scenes where heavy makeups are required. As Kent explained, "We're not shooting in sequence, so you really have to think of what you're going to be doing. Cuts have to follow through. You have to work it out with the director so that it matches what you're going to be shooting."

But how does a makeup person remember what a cut or wound that changes shape as the movie progresses, looks like in each shot, when shooting is out of sequence? "I come from the era before Polaroid," said Kent. "I have a pretty good memory for what I do, but you do take Polaroids now, so you do have references that you can match."

For Kent, the most difficult part of her work on this film was in group scenes, particularly where two cameras are used simultaneously and she has to be in two places at once. The rest, for someone with her experience, was a walk in the park. She is amazed at what is done with air-brushing and CGI, but remarked that traditional methods mean, "You do have that contact with the actor. When the actor sits in front of the makeup mirror, we know how we want them to look for the character, and they become that character. The makeup room is like backstage. They need that. We make them happy. I like the whole process." □

Sony opens the sequel to their 1998 horror hit nationwide September 15.

ence members might get it."

One sequence that poked fun at the 1970's disaster movie, *AIRPORT*, was cut from *URBAN LEGENDS 2*. As a film-within-a-film is shot on board a plane, "the actress is so intensely bad, that one of our characters yells at her, 'You're not Karen Black, for God's sake. You're not supposed to fly the plane; you're just supposed to scream!' Nobody at the studio even got it!"

Despite the success of the first *URBAN LEGEND*, Ottman claimed there was no pressure from Columbia to make a sequel that was similar. "Actually the pressure was the opposite," he said. "It's even more nerve-racking. 'Make this different from the first one, but don't ruin our franchise.' In my view, the audience is either going to completely embrace it for being different, or completely reject it for being different. When Jim Carrey decided to go against the grain and be a dark, weird character in *CABLE GUY*, it was at a time when they thought his fans were crying out for something different, and they rejected it.

"We were originally scouting out a typical gothic University," he continued, giving an example of his vision, "and I thought: 'Every movie is like this.' I thought we should do something completely different and go to a contemporary, very

URBAN COMIC RELIEF

Anthony Anderson on black humor.

By Paul Wardle

Anthony Anderson of NBC's SATURDAY MORNING HANG TIME plays one of two outcast film students who provide comedy relief from the gore and suspense.

Anderson's real-life character is well-suited to the job. Despite his size and mock aggressiveness, there is nothing menacing about him. He doesn't seem to take himself, or interviews too seriously. A native of California, he is not enjoying the onset of winter in Toronto, where these location shots are being filmed in November and December.

Anderson referred to his role in URBAN LEGENDS 2 as "Black Guy #1," treading a fine line between serious indignation and ironic humor. "You can tell the readers that the black guy don't die first! He don't die second, third, fourth or fifth! 87th? I'm still around."

Since this means that Anderson's character is still alive towards the end of the movie, one would expect him to be on set shooting most of the time. Not so, said Anderson. "I sort of come in and out," he said of the role. "There are parts where I have an anatomically correct dummy that I walk around with. 5'5", 135 pounds, buck naked, one of the special effects for the student film that we're making. Imagine me and my buddy walking around with the head of this woman all bloody, and going into a restaurant, or walking around school with this dummy that has on a G-string and tits exposed. It's funny. It lends itself to humor. We're supposed to be somewhat geeky."

So are all the main charac-



Token Victim: Anderson with Michael Bacall (l) and Morrison. N.A.A.C.P please note, no Afro-Americans were hurt during filming.

ters geeky students? "No, no," replied Anderson. "They have all the other white people in the movie looking very handsome and glamorous and lovely. They put the minorities in the geeky roles." This touches off a wave of mockoutrage. "You just make sure you get a message to the N.A.A.C.P, and tell them that I'm working!"

Among Anderson's favorite horror movies were HALLOWEEN, FRIDAY THE 13TH, and POLTERGEIST. This is his first time acting in the genre. Though he's enjoying it, he was looking forward to doing some interesting stunts but, according to Anderson, "We're far behind. They've been cutting a lot of stuff in the movie. The first stuff to cut in the movie was a lot of 'The Black Guy's' stuff. When the people watch this movie, they're probably going to feel a little cheated. They cut all my good stuff out. I don't even have a stunt man in this. I do my own stunts. So that lets you know I ain't doing nothin."

Of course, Anderson is kidding around, but seems gen-

uinely disappointed in his part being cut. When asked what a stunt man would've had to do, he rambled off the sequence of events with jokey bitterness. "Take a pick through the head, fall off a ladder down to a roller coaster, roll into a lake, you know, just some good shit like that, but *no!* *None of that's happening now!* But Dirk, the white boy in the movie, he gets to go through four hours of prosthetic makeup. He gets the *special* stuff."

Since Anderson keeps returning to racial concerns, whether serious about it or not, why not get his perspective on black actors in the Hollywood of today. "Hollywood seems to think you can only have one black person in each movie. I tend to think that when you have more than one black face in a movie, it all of a sudden becomes a 'black movie,' as opposed to being just a movie with minorities in it."

To be fair, the scenes with the FX comedy duo were the easiest to remove without disturbing the flow of the plot, and Anderson agrees. "There were a lot of parts cut from the movie. I can't really take it personally," he admitted. "There were a lot more jokes between Stan and Dirk throughout this movie. Not that I count my lines or anything, but you're hired to do a job, and you come all this way, and find out that after rewrites, you've got six lines. It's a job. It happens. We understand that this is a job. This is what we came here to do. So complaining really isn't going to do any good. I come to work and I have fun. I'm living my dream. I don't know too many people who can say that." □

modernistic University. Because it revolves around a film school that is supposed to be the best in the world, it would be a modern place. I had to convince a couple of producers and sell them on the idea."

When Ottman finally found a modern looking university to use as the setting for his film, he realized that it had no tower in its architecture. "I'd written a tower into the script, a thing that we continually see [throughout the film], and the whole climactic scene takes place in it. We found this place, which was awesome, but no tower, so we ended up having to build a tower on a structure, and it was a bit of a monstrosity of a bill for us with our budget."

Though many scenes were cut for budgetary reasons, when it came to the location on which this interview took place, Ottman said he "lucked out. There was this big showpiece scene, where you're in this bizarre amusement park ride. I had originally changed it to a kind of Santa's Village. We looked all over for a place. We knew we couldn't build it on a sound stage, which we had actually thought about doing, and then we found this place [Ontario Place]. It was a miner's ride, so we just changed the story to make it into a miner's ride."

Working on this site is great for Ottman, as he explained, "It gives the film huge production value. It looks like we spent millions! Of course, we did do a lot of redressing. We put a track in instead of the logs they had. We built miner's cars, and constructed track to put through the ride."

And a good suspense film itself takes the viewer on a ride. But how does a neophyte director, with 80 years worth of past horror movies in the public consciousness, come up with new scares for today's jaded audiences? Ottman isn't pressured by this fact. "I try not to do the same gags we've all seen, but they've pretty much all been done. I do try to do them a new way. One of the scariest things in a film to me is when you don't need music to scare someone. I remember a scene, a gag with a different form to it in SILKWOOD. She's sneaking around and she opens up a file cabinet, and she's looking



“I wanted it to be more of a thriller, more Hitchcockian,” said Ottman, “and to make it as intelligent as I could, while not alienating the audience that wants horror.”

through files, and when she closes it, there’s someone standing right beside her. No music, but it scared the living shit out of me. We’ve attempted to do the same thing here in a bathroom scene. There’s not a whole lot of that kind of thing in this movie. I know what’s going to happen in the test screenings. The first question will be: “Were you scared?”

If that happens, Ottman isn’t sure the answers will all be affirmative, but he added, “I don’t want the fact that they weren’t scared to be construed to mean the film wasn’t good. A lot of great films aren’t scary, they’re just tense. The idea for this movie is for it to be tense, and not let the tension let up.”

Ottman has worked closely with the producers of *URBAN LEGENDS 2*, one of whom is Gina Matthews, who oversaw the beginnings of the first film, and was instrumental in getting it made. According to Matthews, the original was an unqualified success for the studio in 1998. “It’s made almost \$90 million worldwide,” she said.

Although first-time director John Ottman had major casting approval, Matthews, who produced the sequel with Neal B. Moritz, was an important part of the process. “When I was approached about a sequel, I really did not want to do a rehash of the first movie,” she said. “Normally that happens with sequels. But I thought it would be great if we could find the right [script]. So we just started meeting with writers. The writer of the first one was too busy and unavailable to do it, so we listened to about 75 takes, between all the producers, and narrowed it down.”

The producer of Phoenix



Celebrating the start of filming last Halloween in Toronto (l to r) Bacall, Anderson, Marco Hofschneider, Matthew Davi, Morrison, Joseph Lawrence, Jessica Cauffiel, Anson Mount and Eva Mendes. Below: Morrison as a ghost in *STIR OF ECHOES*.

Pictures came up with the idea of making the setting a film school, and according to Matthews, it was also his wish to do “more of a psychological thriller in the tone of *GASLIGHT*, rather than just a straight horror movie. We sort of knew the framework and the setting, and had a lot of different writers use that with their different visions on how to make that movie.”

They eventually decided on a script by Paul Harris Boardman and Scott Derrickson. Matthews agreed with Ottman that the studio not to try to copy the success of the first film. As sequels go, that viewpoint from a studio is rather rare. “I think they really trusted John and his vision. A lot of times sequels don’t do as well as the original, so we would

rather take the risk of doing something unique and special, than betting that the same audience that came to the first movie will come to the second. We’d like to get new people in addition to that audience.”

Starting fresh, they chose an all-new cast, that includes Anson Mount (*ALLY McBEAL*), Joseph Lawrence (*BROTHERLY LOVE*), Jessica Cauffiel (*FRASIER*), Eva Mendez (*A NIGHT AT THE ROXBURY*), Matt Davis and Anthony Anderson (*LIBERTY HEIGHTS*). The only returning cast member from the first *URBAN LEGEND*, is Loretta Devine, with a special cameo by Rebecca Gayheart.

The casting choice of Jennifer Morrison, though not a total newcomer, was based on a



screen test. Jennifer beat out dozens of other girls, and after narrowing it down to four girls—who tested on camera, Morrison wowed them and won the part. “Jennifer was by far the most incredible,” said Matthews. “She had the most amazing screen presence and a sense of uniqueness in her performance. She had relatability, an ‘every-girl.’ She was up for a lot of other movies, so we’re very lucky to have her. Her chemistry with Matt Davis, who plays the Trevor Travis role, is really terrific, and you could see that on the test, also. That’s very important in choosing your cast; how their chemistry is together.”

Noted Morrison, who played a ghost in *STIR OF ECHOES*, “The role is definitely a strong one,” she said. “I’m pulling guns on people, climbing around, saving people and trying to figure things out.” □

Typecasting: *URBAN LEGEND 2* lead Jennifer Morrison played the ghost in *STIR OF ECHOES*, haunting the rim of Kathryn Erbe’s bath *SIXTH SENSE* style.



REQUIEM FOR A DREAM

A peek at PI director Darren Aronofsky's offbeat adaptation of Hubert Selby Jr.

By Patrick Legare

PI helmer Darren Aronofsky's second feature, *REQUIEM FOR A DREAM*, based on Hubert Selby Jr.'s novel, is a very dark tale of addiction and obsession. It stars Jared Leto, Marlon Wayans and genre veterans Jennifer Connelly (*CREEPERS*, *DARK CITY*) and Ellen Burstyn (*THE EXORCIST*). It features splendid makeup effects by Vincent J. Guastini (*DOGMA*). Artisan plans a limited Fall release in October.

The film tells a two-fold story—one follows Sara Goldfarb (Ellen Burstyn), an older woman who desperately tries to lose weight in anticipation of her appearance on her favorite TV game show. She quickly becomes addicted to her diet pills. The other side of the story follows her son Harry (Jared Leto), a young man whose dreams of hitting the big time lead him and his buddy Tyrone (Marlon Wayans) to make a drug deal. Jennifer Connelly stars as Harry's girlfriend Marion. All three become addicted to the cocaine they're supposed to sell. Their addictions stretch over the period of a year as they quickly dive to ground zero, leading to some spectacular visuals.

The low-budget picture cost roughly \$4.5 million (according to *Variety*) and was produced primarily by Artisan Entertainment and Palmer West's Sibling Produc-

Makeup rejected by Aronofsky for the final stage of drug-ravaged Jared Leto's gangrenous arm, design by Guastini for a dark tale of obsession.



THE EXORCIST's Ellen Burstyn as a drug-wasted mental patient, makeup by Vincent Guastini.

tions. Aronofsky has deals to shoot *PROTEUS* for Dimension and *RONIN* for New Line Cinema, but tackled the writing and directing duties on *REQUIEM* first. The film screened successfully at Cannes.

The effects work done by Guastini involved both aspects of the story. He had to make Ellen Burstyn grow increasingly thinner, and he had to depict Jared Leto's slow destruction. "Jared keeps jabbing this hole in his arm full of drugs," Guastini explained. "It gets gangrenous."

Having worked on *DOGMA* and the much-reviled *NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD, 30th ANNIVERSARY EDITION*, Guastini was not prepared for the treatment he would receive on *REQUIEM*'s set. "Darren changes his mind constantly and this film was a nightmare to work on," he said candidly. "It was a living nightmare to try and please Darren because he changed his mind so much. Ellen did not like me. I was Dr. Pain. She hated anything on her face; she's very sensitive about it. We did not get along and it caused a lot of personal conflicts behind the scenes because she just did not like the prosthetics. It was basically gi-

ant wrap-around neck pieces and cheeks to make her look fatter, and then to make her look gaunt."

Burstyn refused to wear approved designs on the day of shooting. Recalled Guastini, "We would build things [for Ellen]. Darren would okay them and then on the day of shooting, Ellen would say, 'I'm not wearing that.' I'm sitting there with weeks of people working on stuff and hours of salaries that just went out the window. They wanted to please Ellen. They didn't want to piss off the star and that was it."

Guastini maintained that he is not angry with Burstyn and does not blame the filmmakers for their constant changes. Instead, he feels it reflects their inexperience in working on effects films. "They had never worked with this stuff before," he explained. "They didn't know the logistics of it."

Despite these problems, Guastini added, "We were doing some really, really beautiful work."

For Burstyn's three-stage thinning progress, Guastini used some of his experience from *STEPHEN KING'S THINNER*. "That was a big lesson," he said of *THINNER*. However, he added, "I think the stuff in the final stages of *REQUIEM* are based more in reality than *THINNER* would ever be. I dare anybody to call this stuff rubber."

The first stage had Burstyn wearing a small cheek piece and the wrap-around neckpiece. Next, Guastini took away more on the cheeks by shading. "The final stages were really, really gaunt," he said. "You get close-ups and there's quite emotional scenes where she pisses in her pants in a mental ward after electro-shock treatments. It looks marvelous."

That final look took roughly two-and-a-half hours to apply, and Burstyn was actually quite pleased with the look. "She loved the final stage makeup," Guastini said. "She was very cool as far as what we had to do by then. I do respect her. I'm a big fan of her work." Burstyn's wig work in the final

The Makeup Artistry of Vincent Guastini

The East Coast designer on his bizarre work for Kevin Smith's *DOGMA*.

By Patrick Legare

Prior to *REQUIEM FOR A DREAM*, Guastini provided outstanding makeup effects for Kevin Smith's *DOGMA*. "It was a nightmare again, but what isn't a nightmare anymore," he exclaimed. "The only difference with this nightmare was that whatever was going on, I had the director and the producer both behind me all the way. It was like trying to build Mount Everest in a limited amount of time. Not only did I have to build all this stuff in a quick amount of time, you have to have quality behind it and it has to be different. It has to excite people and I have to be excited about it. I want to top myself with each film we do. That was the challenge with *DOGMA*."

Guastini had heard rumors that Smith was possibly going to work on films of *SCOOBY DOO* and *THE SIX-MILLION DOLLAR MAN*, so he sent him a package introducing his work. When Guastini met with Smith and producer Scott A. Mosier, he came prepared with some designs for *DOGMA*'s infamous Shit Monster. It won him the job. "Even if I did really bad work on it, it really wouldn't matter, it's a shit monster!" Guastini laughed. "But I don't think that way, I have to come up with something cool. Sort of like Slimer on *GHOSTBUSTERS* or the Marshmallow Man, I didn't want it to be cheesy."

In addition to the Shit Monster makeup, Guastini had to create dozens of victims for the church massacre at the film's



Barrett Hackney as a melted undead Stygian Hockey Demon, cut as part of Smith's original ending, scrapped and reshot.

close, armor to be worn by some of the characters, Jason Lee's demon makeup and, most importantly, wings for the film's two devilish angels Ben Affleck and Matt Damon. "They had to beat any other wings that were in films before," said Guastini.

Unlike the wings done for films such as *BRAZIL* or *MICHAEL*, Guastini and his team had to create fully animatronic wings that had to function in every way. "They had to flap, move, fold and do everything all in one movement," said Guastini. For the design, director Kevin Smith referred Guastini to a comic book drawing. "Kevin was real specific, he whipped out a comic book, the *JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA* wings!"

The wings wound up becoming a particular bane to the filmmakers because of the problems Guastini and his crew had with them. Kevin Smith was sur-

prised to find just how difficult it was to make the effects work properly. "It got off to a really rough start when we were on the set," he remembered. "What I was trying to explain to them was, that a lot of times you get great moments with special effects and puppets. You get happy little accidents. Behind the scenes in the war room I call my office, because that's what it turned into, I felt like Patton on this film."

A disappointment for Guastini was that the original ending he worked on was cut in favor of the current church massacre. "It was more of the Shit Monster in a hospital scene," he said. "A Stygian Triplet, one of those evil hockey twins, comes back to life, his head gets melted, and he kills Linda Fiorentino. That was the original ending. They wanted to change Linda Fiorentino's death so in doing that, they lost the melting Stygian triplet, it was really outlandish and over the top, but just beautiful. I saw the dailies of it and it was really cool." □

Guastini poses with the Shit Monster that won him the job, including crafting wings for angel Ben Affleck.



The film, released by Artisan in October, also stars Jennifer Connelly, seen in Alex Proyas' *DARK CITY*.

sequence was done by Paul Leblanc (1984 Oscar-winner with Dick Smith for Makeup on *AMADEUS*).

Guastini's work on Jared Leto was less stressful, but went through dozens of changes that came down from Aronofsky. "I have endless video tests of arms and different shaped holes," he explained.

Leto's intravenous drug use leads to a rather nasty infection. The final result is a goremeister's dream: amputation. "We did all these different layers of tubing and skin consistencies under the skin so that when the bone saw goes through it, it really looked like muscle. They did two takes of it, and the second was like a fountain. It shot up so far because I had the pressure going through it really high. I was getting a lot of impatience from the line producer and other people that never worked with effects before, so I wanted to make sure that when the cut went into the arm, it was just gonna fucking spray everybody!" □

CHERRY

ROMPER STOMPER director Geoffrey Wright

By Dan Scapperotti

Dark woods. Parked car. A young couple embrace, but the girl says no and pulls away. The next day the boy and girl are found slaughtered. The set up for your typical teenage horror film? Maybe, but *CHERRY FALLS*, the new film by Australian filmmaker Geoffrey Wright offers a twist on the theme. Good girls die first. Destination Films opens Wright's unabashed slasher film nationwide September 29.

After attending film school, Wright began writing film reviews for Australian newspapers until he penned a script for *ROMPER STOMPER*. "It's a pretty dishonorable job," laughed Wright about his journalistic period. "I feel I've crossed the line going from one side to the other." The controversial film starred Russell Crowe

Brittany Murphy stars as Jody Marken in Wright's throwback to the *FRIDAY THE 13TH* slasher movies.



School principal Mr. Sisler (Joe Inscoe) becomes the target of a crazed killer terrifying the small town of Cherry Falls, a USA Films release, September 29.

and Jacqueline McKenzie. A group of white supremacists lash out at the Asian population.

Coming to the States, Wright took a hand in Fox's *SILVER SURFER* project based on the Marvel comic book character. Unfortunately, the production never got off the ground. "I think that the inherent problem with Silver Surfer was that of all the Marvel characters, Surfer was the most esoteric," said the director. "I think it's always difficult for a big studio that wants to make kind of a flashy action movie. They felt uncomfortable about indulging or exploring other dimensions that are coupled with the action in the comic book source material. I failed to convince Fox that that dimension was important. We ended up with a very good script. It's in the archives now, and I'm sure no one will ever shoot it."

In his new film, a mysterious figure with long hair and manicured fingernails has taken a distinct dislike of the students of George Washington High School in Cherry Falls, Vir-

ginia, in particular, the unlucky lads and lasses who have somehow managed to keep their virginity. "This was the genius of Ken Selden's script," said the director. "It just took a very cherished cliché of the genre and turned it around and did the opposite. It was absurd and attractive at the same time. It's kind of colorful and weird and perverse and I think a little subversive. It's really a throwback to the '80s slasher films. It's old fashioned in that way. It owes a lot more to *FRIDAY THE 13TH* and those kind of things than the *SCREAM* films. On the surface, it's a more primitive animal I think. At the same time it's a dirtier animal. It's more textured and full of contradictions. It's fun, and I had fun making it and I like watching the movie now. In filmmaking you can't always say that."

Sex and violence, what would horror films be like today without those two elements? Both gave Wright problems with the "censors," a term that, being an Australian, the director uses freely, blissfully unaware

that it is politically incorrect. We don't have censors. No. We have ratings boards. "These days, the production houses and the studios really want an R-rating," said Wright, "so you shoot the material the way you think is ideal, but you give yourself plenty of coverage because you know there's a good chance someone will object to what you've done. You'll have to substitute a shot or lose a shot. But, I have to tell you that we had more trouble with the sex in the movie than we did with the violence. As an Australian it didn't surprise me. There's a perception that Americans and American institutions, and by that I mean the censors, are more upset with sex than they are with violence and that's traditionally been the case, I think. Seeing that the film ends with a kind of teenage orgy, caused more alarm with the censors than the violence. There was a little we had to do with the violence but quite a lot we had to do with the sex. That was sad because it was shot beautifully and it was cute and really well done and as tasteful as we could do it. I think we had ten times as many changes to do with the sex than the violence."

Apparently, you can get away with more on cable television than you can when you come up against the MPAA. A big part of *CHERRY FALLS* is based on sex, or the deadly lack of it. Wright would have been more amused with the antics of the board if they weren't so frustrating. To save the commercially sacred R-rating, Wright could indicate that the characters were engaged in intercourse, but he couldn't show the participants moving. "We could show coupling or some kind of embrace, but they



FALLS

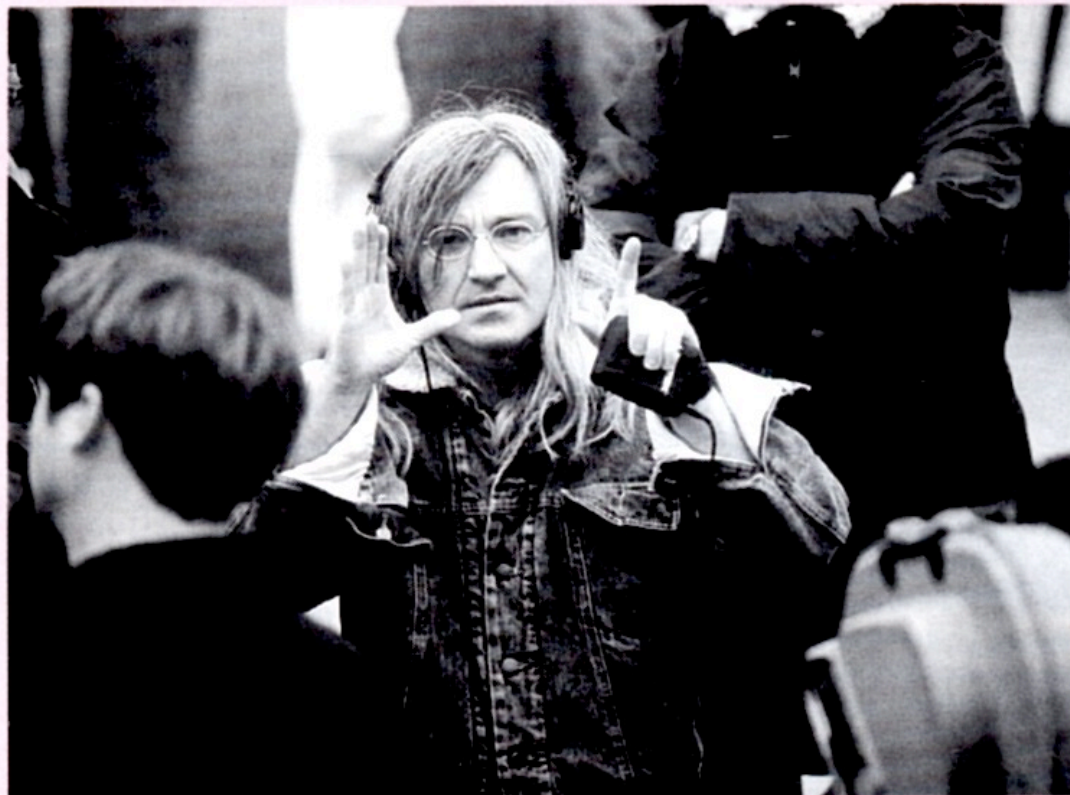
on his unabashed stab as the slasher genre.

couldn't move," he said. "It's a popular theory that sex does involve a certain amount of movement. In one scene, we had a wide shot which had a lot of movement. We thought we could solve the problem by going to close-ups from the shoulders up. We screened that version and we got a letter back saying there was still a problem with that, because it was clear and obvious that the bodies were still thrusting, even though we were showing it from the shoulders up. Then we had to go and find shots where there was no movement. So we kept making compromises, which was too bad, but that's what we had to do." Wright admitted that the age of the characters, high school kids, may have contributed to the strident restrictions. And the fact that the horrible Columbine High School massacre was still on everyone's mind. "Maybe we'd have had more freedom if the characters had been older," he said.

Shooting in and around Richmond, Virginia, Wright was able to use the interiors of some local mansions. Desperate to avoid death at the hands of the serial killer, the students decide to take matters into their own hands, so to speak. They organize a "Pop Your Cherry Ball," a godsend for the school's nerd population. "Putting on an orgy with 150 people in one of those southern mansions which are very old, was not an easy thing to do," Wright said. "Those places are falling apart and fire traps and we had to take a lot of precautions."

Heading up the young cast is Brittany Murphy who stars as Jody Marken, the center of the killer's attention and the one who manages to survive his attack. "My strongest impression of Brittany was in CLUE-

"I'm not a big fan of horror films that nudge you in the ribs," said Wright. "I don't think CHERRY FALLS does that...I like my horror straight or slightly satirical."



Wright directs on location in Richmond, Virginia. The Aussie helmer was signed to do Marvel's SILVER SURFER for Fox, but the studio nixed his script.

LESS," said Wright. "She was the makeover girl in that film. To me, she had an unconventional sexuality, both in person and on the screen. I think in American films, the bias is towards blue-eyed, fair-haired, taller chicks and Brittany is more petite with a darker complexion and dark eyes. She has this kind of Italian or gypsy thing going. I thought this would be in keeping with the mood of the film, which is a little bit against conventional wisdom. So we went with someone who was kind of darkly sexy rather than girl-next-door sexy."

For Jody's parents, Wright cast genre veterans, Michael

Biehn and Candy Clark. Her father, Brent Marken, is the town sheriff who begins to realize that the motive behind the killings may reside in the town's past and a dark secret that hovers over some of the leading citizens. He saw Biehn's usual screen persona as upright and reliable and decided to cast against type. "Michael was very important to us because he would be very much at home playing a member of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police," said the director. "To me, he represented considered, measured authority. To have him play a character with such a tortured, checkered past was a lot of fun. We asked him to play it

in a very straight-ahead manner."

When Wright was discussing the role of Marge Marken with casting director Johanna Ray, he told her he wanted someone dry and kookie. He said "I wonder what would have happened to the girl from THE MAN WHO FELL TO EARTH if she had gotten older and settled down in somewhere like Virginia. The kind of person I'm looking for is like that character, but older." Ray suggested casting Candy Clark. "I said, 'Candy Clark!'" recalled Wright. "'What a great idea.' So instead of using that character that she plays as a kind of guide, we decided to cast the guide herself. I adored working with her."

New York-based special makeup effects artist Neal Martz was tapped to deliver the blood-drenched body count. "He did the heavy gore makeup," said Wright, whose favorite blood-letting scene is the Black Knight episode in MONTY PYTHON AND THE HOLY GRAIL. "I told him that this film is a little bit crazy and I wanted him to give me as much blood as possible. Of course, bearing in mind that we're going to have to deal with an R-rating and of course the censors are concerned with the visible signs of blood. I told Neal to give me as much as he could, but we have to be careful with the censors."

"I'm not a big fan of horror films that nudge you in the ribs," said Wright. "I don't think CHERRY FALLS does that. We do play with some clichés, but we don't have a lot of in-jokes or things like that. They may work in the marketplace, but that's not something I want to do. I like my horror straight or slightly satirical." □

THE CELL

Producer Julio Caro on serial-killer chic with Jennifer Lopez.

By Dennis Fischer

Scenarist Mark Protosevich combined two of his favorite subjects, mind-probing and serial killers, to create *THE CELL*, New Line's \$48 million cinematic *tour de force* that explores the mind-scape of a serial killer, Carl Stargher (Vincent D'Onofrio).

THE CELL co-producer Julio Caro (*SIESTA*, *GET CARTER*) credited star Jennifer Lopez with being fundamental to the film's getting made. "Jennifer read the script some years ago and thought it was just fantastic, Caro recalled. "Jennifer's an actress who was willing to take risks." New Line Cinema opens the film nationwide August 18.

THE CELL is directed by Tarsem, a commercial and music video director with a striking visual style, who makes his feature film debut. A native of India who was educated in a boarding school in the Himalayas before coming to the United States to study business at Harvard, Tarsem soon realized he preferred to study film and transferred to the Art Center in Pasadena. He has directed such music videos as Suzanne Vega's "Tired of Sleeping," REM's "Losing My Religion," and Nine Inch Nail's "Closer," as well as commercials for countries all over the world, including one Nike commercial where a soccer team competes against demons and a Smirnoff commercial aboard a luxury liner where the bottle brings out the people's inner selves. Caro worked with Tarsem at Radical Media, his



Seduced by the dark side, FBI agent Vince Vaughn and Jennifer Lopez as therapist Catherine Deane, costumes by Eiko Ishioka.

commercial rep, when *THE CELL* came to their attention.

Tarsem's work combines elaborate sounds and visuals synergistically to create arresting cinematic moments that carried his advertising work to the apex of the field. In order to establish himself as a director of long-form films, however, Tarsem wanted to find material that would give his visual style free rein. Noted Caro, "When *THE CELL* came in, it caught his eye, and he said, 'No one is going to tell me what the inside of a serial killer's mind is like. No one is going to give me rules, because once I'm inside someone's mind, dream logic prevails, and I can do whatever I please in that environment.'"

According to Caro, while Tarsem maintained fidelity to Protosevich's themes, the script

was developed around Tarsem's visions. "[Tarsem] took the script, and responded to that element of going into the mind of a serial killer to solve this crime, and he began to incorporate a lot of his visual interests, things that he has been carrying with him for a while, ideas that he thought would be terrific in a feature film. Tarsem's imagination was left to fly free inside the serial killer's mind. We took about six or seven months to work on the script to see if we could combine Mark's vision with Tarsem's vision, and the film is what we got."

While Tarsem's work is unique, it does pull from a wide variety of visual influences including Hindi musicals, the photographic style of Pierre & Gilles, Oskar Schlemmer drawings, Georg Kolbe statues, Andrei Tarkovsky's films, the photography of Jan Saudek, and British artist Damian Hirst, who is known for his profound morbidity and use of preserved animals encased in glass, which touches on the recurring theme of dead animals that pervade Stargher's demented mind.

"Tarsem's vision is dramatically original," said Caro, "Tarsem goes to the next level. One thing about Tarsem, he is remarkably consistent in his vision, he doesn't move dramatically from one thing to another, other than [in his use of] black and white. The one thing I would like to say to your readers is that Tarsem will bring a remarkably original perspective and point of view and photogra-



Lopez in the mind of a serial killer.

phy to filmmaking.

"He's a big fan of horror films. He loves B-movies—inasmuch as they don't try to be anything else—and the simplicity of their stories. What he has tried to do is elevate a B-movie, those macroelements that make us respond and can take you on this wild ride, and he elevates it with a visual vocabulary that I think is remarkably unique."

Tarsem is equally striking in his use of music to match his visuals. For *THE CELL* he hired Howard Shore who composed the score for *SEVEN*. Explained Caro, "Tarsem and David Fincher are friendly, they know each other socially, and they are both fascinated by similar visual images, situations. I think there is no accident that the serial killer thing is in both of their films—the grotesque and the violence. Tarsem is fascinated with the violent side of human nature."

To photograph the film, Tarsem brought aboard his longtime cinematographer Paul Laufer, who has served as d.p. on music videos for Sade, Whitney Houston, Simply Red, REM, Roy Obison, Fine Young Cannibals, and Jody Watley. They have a shorthand of communication," said Caro. "Paul understands just when he walks on a set and looks at an image how Tarsem is looking to light it and looking to make it work, and that was a terrific thing for our film, because that shorthand is a key to the movie. It kept the set moving



The look of evil envisioned by rock video stylist Tarsem, design by Tom Foden.

quickly and kept everybody speaking the same language.

"Theatrical films are the only form of collaborative fine art, and I can say there is a balance here between the written word, the script, the actors performance, and the visuals. I would say that all three of them are equal, there isn't one that is dominant over the others, though some people would argue that Tarsem's visuals are dominant, but that is only because they are so original that you just remember them and talk about them, but I think when you think about it in the context of the film, he is very careful to balance it.

"He does want to be a filmmaker. He is very ambitious continuing his feature film career. He doesn't just want to be pegged as just being a visual stylist; he does care about the characters, he cares about story, he wants to take you for a wild ride. He does want to put people in the seats. He doesn't want to pry people off, he wants to entertain you."

Protosevich seems to have a bright future ahead of him, having also scripted this year's IMPOSTOR, opening October 6 from Miramax, based on a Philip K. Dick story, and having been hired to script forthcoming versions of Richard Matheson's horror classic I AM LEGEND and Robert A. Heinlein's STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND. (He also wrote a script

for a proposed fifth BATMAN movie and did a rewrite of the alien western GHOST RIDERS IN THE SKY.)

Said Caro, "I think first and foremost that the writer took the position no matter how evil, no matter how disturbed, there is an opportunity for some form of redemption. Obviously, our killer is deeply disturbed, has stalked his victims. We see this, we see that he bleaches them like dolls, he tortures them in the watertight cell, so when you go into the mind, the intention was that you see him as a young boy, as a regular guy, as his idealized self [Stargher King], which takes on many images. Tarsem's concept is the id has five or six incarnations, and they can all co-exist in this world.

"[Protosevich] attempts to explain the causes of this man's insanity as being a) viral, where he is infected with a disease that affects the mind, b) a long history of abuse from an overbearing, totally insensitive father, and c) to a lesser extent, but it is out there, from society and the violence in society in images that he sees. Tarsem took this in very subtle ways where you see a history of human torture if you will, little snippets of it that are suggestive that our killer, through the trauma of religion and images of torture in religion, that our killer has made these part of his reality."

Carl Stargher, who seems to

JULIO CARO, CO-PRODUCER

"Tarsem cares about the story. He wants to take you for a wild ride. He does want to put people in the seats. He doesn't want to pry people off, he wants to entertain you."

take on a different appearance each time he is seen, needed to be played by a brilliant actor, and in the highly talented Vincent D'Onofrio (WHOLE WIDE WORLD, MEN IN BLACK), Tarsem found the talent he was looking for. "Vincent D'Onofrio has to be lauded," said Caro. "As much as Jennifer took a risk, D'Onofrio took the same risk in a completely different direction. D'Onofrio plays a villain who is troubled, disturbing, violent—this is not the kind of guy you're going to fall in love with. And yet, he jumped into it with Tarsem and presented an original point of view on this guy. He was very involved with the costuming and the design, very involved in the language and how he speaks. He and Tarsem truly collaborated on every aspect of his character, and for both of them it was a fulfilling experience. D'Onofrio is a tremendous actor."

As Caro notes, there was an interesting mix in acting approaches on the part of the three principal players, including Vince Vaughn as FBI agent Peter Novack. "You have a Method actor in D'Onofrio, who truly builds the character organically from within, and you have a highly technical actress in Jennifer," he said. "As soon as you say cut, she is Jennifer Lopez, she is not the character, but her tone was very similar to her character. Both she and Vaughn were very natural, and D'Onofrio was extremely deliberate and would not want to be disturbed and needed his space. We needed to respect those boundaries, because he was working with quite a full deck, he had a lot to deal with, while Jennifer and Vaughn, while working equally with a lot of material, were able to go back and forth and have a meeting with the producers if they needed to. It was an inter-

esting mix of people.

Tarsem was fascinated by the character of Stargher, the killer. Said Caro, "The killer is arguably the tentpole of the film, which is unusual, because Jennifer Lopez's character is the lead in the film, but she doesn't drive much forward. The Vincent D'Onofrio character is the character [that they are exploring the mind of].

"Tarsem was really looking for influences along the same lines of redemption, but not thinking in that literal a sense and that word. Tarsem took the written word; he doesn't want to change the themes the writer was playing with, he went with them and said, 'I want to make it work. I want to bolster those themes with visual images which could reaffirm those themes.' Throughout the film you see flashes of images, like a little roadmap of his trauma and his fascinations and his illness, and our detective and Jennifer Lopez see these things and try to make a case for understanding this guy's madness." □

Vaughn finds a victim of the serial killer who drowns his prey in a huge glass tank known as "the cell."



Lost Souls

Winona Ryder and Ben Chaplin on taking a leap of faith in thought-provoking horror.

By Douglas Eby

One of the story elements in New Line's "upscale supernatural thriller" is a deep conflict between faith and scientific reason. Crime journalist Peter Kelson (Ben Chaplin) is contacted by Maya Larkin (Winona Ryder), about a conspiracy to enable the Devil to take over a human form: Kelson's.

His character "doesn't believe in it at all," Chaplin (*THE THIN RED LINE*; *WASHINGTON SQUARE*) commented, noting it takes "a lot of convincing" on the part of Larkin that he really is threatened with possession. "She's trying to convince me that I'm about to become Satan on Earth. Or rather, the vessel, the container for the Devil. And I'm never truly convinced. No one would be." New Line Cinema opens the film, the directorial debut of celebrated cinematographer Janusz Kaminski, October 13.

The story is partly based on books about real exorcisms conducted by the Catholic church, and Chaplin said he found the film's exorcist consultant, Father James LeBar, to be "quite impressive" and that "some of that stuff is frightening." He reports that Father LeBar said *THE EXORCIST* was "quite a realistic" depiction of an exorcism. "But then we asked him, 'Do heads really spin around?'" Chaplin recalled, "and he said that's an illusion; the head moves so quickly it looks like it's spinning around. But more things happen around the person who is being exorcised. Things they know almost in a psychic way. Odd occurrences."

Asked about other films, he was reminded of when he read the script, Chaplin cited *THE OMEN* and added, "obviously, *THE EXORCIST*. But then this goes further. It touches on other genres as well. Janusz [Kaminski] would kill me for saying this,



Ryder as Maya Larkin, out to stop a conspiracy that will allow the devil to take human form, with exorcist John Hurt, opening for Halloween on October 13.

but there are zombies, kind of servants of the Devil. And I know Janusz likes to think of *ROSEMARY'S BABY*, and there are elements of that, too. Talking about the zombies may bother him because they sound too Gothic, too comic and silly. But it's kind of shorthand to describe what they really are: handmaidens of the Devil."

Chaplin said working on *LOST SOULS* has not especially changed his beliefs: "I remain pretty much the same. I've always been somewhat of an agnostic. But I always think agnostic is a bit of an easy cop-out, you know, sitting on the fence, basically. I'm quite spiritual. I lean more to believing than not believing. It's when it gets too specific that I have problems. So I'm still in this gray area with it."

One of the major themes of the film is summed up in a quote of C.S. Lewis: "There's no neutral ground in the universe. Every square inch is claimed by God and counter-claimed by Satan." Chaplin said he has a problem with that idea. "When we give Satan a name, we're just personifying evil for ourselves, aren't we? We're just naming the beast. There's nothing wrong with that as long as we don't picture a man with horns.

Good and evil exist, I think. But it depends on your definition of evil."

Chaplin said he would be glad if the film were just "pure entertainment," but thinks "it would be nice if it posed questions about the nature of faith. I think there's a fear with a lot of us nowadays that faith is a quirky, cranky kind of thing to do, almost cult-like behavior. I'd love to have true faith, and at the same time, I'm quite glad I don't. I like the bit of healthy cynicism, but at the same time, I think most of us have more faith than we admit or really know."

On these topics, co-star Winona Ryder declared she "knows nothing" and that she really doesn't believe there's a Devil. "I even fluctuate where I stand with religion and God, and I'm kind of at that age where I'm trying to figure out where I am with the issues of faith," she said. "I did read a lot of books when I got attached to the movie, but to me they were almost silly."

She recalled talking to Father LeBar: "I was surprised by a lot of his answers. They were very scientific. I thought he was going to be full of these crazy stories. But he very much believed in possession, and didn't seem to be exaggerating. I definitely have a new respect for priests and people of the church who really believe in possession. Even if I don't believe in it, they are out there taking it very seriously. Even if there's a girl who is schizophrenic or mentally disturbed, and it's coming out like possession, they really examine it, and don't just think it's the Devil. They really do a heavy investigation, to make sure the person's clear of mental disorder.

"I feel like I'm not in any place to say anything about it, because I'm just an actress and I'm just doing this movie. But it's pretty terrifying, whether or not it was real or in your head, it's terrifying either way."



Chaplin plays crime journalist Peter Kelson, who is unmoved by Ryder's pleas that he is about to become possessed by the devil himself, in the stylish directorial debut of cinematographer Janusz Kaminski.

Ryder thinks of her character Maya Larkin as "a very realistic person" who knows how ridiculous it sounds to talk to others about possession. "But she's also had first-hand experience with it, and been an assistant in exorcisms with a priest, and is a great believer," she said. "Her great dilemma is having to convince this person [Peter Kelson], who is completely devoid of faith, that this very supernatural thing is about to happen."

Her personal skepticism about the supernatural is a big part of why Ryder was attracted to the movie, she said. "It's not something I ever thought about. My mom is a Buddhist and my father is an atheist, and I was raised to respect religion, but I've been told my whole life there is no Devil, there is no Hell. I saw it as one of the greatest challenges, playing a character who believes in something so strongly. It was a great opportunity to explore my own stance with God and with faith and religion, and just kind of experiment with it."

"Five years ago, I don't think I would have considered doing it," she added. "But as you hit your twenties, you find yourself going through first experiences of losing people to death and other kinds of profound things, and you end up finding yourself praying. And if you haven't been raised in any religion, you must wonder, 'Who am I praying to? What do I believe in? Who am I asking for help or for strength?' And I've kind of hit that time in my life in the

last five years. It's been time for me for a while to figure out what my idea is. And if it changes every year, I think that's fine, too. You hear that a lot about actors. One year Madonna's Jewish, and next year Catholic. I don't think it's hypocritical. I think it's great to explore everything."

Ryder noted this isn't a standard horror film. "That's another reason I was really drawn to it," she said. "It wasn't full of gore. But the scary scenes in it reminded me of Polanski or the director of *DON'T LOOK NOW* [Nicolas Roeg]. It's more like these weird images without music and quick flashes, very eerie, more like someone's slowly losing their mind. And that, to me, is much more scary than someone chasing you with an axe. It's not like the fear in it is not tangible. You wonder, is she seeing? Is that really happening or is she just going crazy. Is she insane? And I think that kind of fear is much more frightening."

Ryder said she appreciated the kind of

Chaplin and Ryder become uneasy allies in thwarting the devilish plot in a horror effort nursed by New Line Cinema that was originally scheduled for release last year.



“[LOST SOULS] wasn't full of gore. But the scary scenes in it reminded me of Polanski or the director of *DON'T LOOK NOW* [Nicolas Roeg].”

—Actress Winona Ryder—

relationship there was between Larkin and Kelson. "It's not so much a pretty girl's trying to get his attention," she commented. "In a way it's great that there's not a big love story. It's not like we're attracted to each other. Our relationship is much more unique. It's not like they fall in love, but they begin to really care about each other, and kind of love each other at the end of it. But not in the typical boy meets girl way. What a relief."

The biggest part about choosing the movie was Janusz Kaminski. "I wanted to work with him, to be part of his directorial debut, and if it was this script, fine," Ryder said. "I think Janusz is absolutely brilliant. And what's great is that the crew were all guys who started with him on *SCHINDLER'S LIST* and maybe even before that. He doesn't bottle things in. When something happens he kind of yells it out, and you never take it personally. It's not directed at anyone. He's very open and very respectful of everyone's job, because he's had all those jobs in his life. As an actor, I'm amazed. He was always very sensitive and wonderful as a D.P. on *AMERICAN QUILT*. Maybe it's being married to an actress, like he is. And visually, he's just a genius. You know that from all the movies he's done with Spielberg. I mean, he created this whole new type of cinematography that we haven't had."

About the experience of shooting the film, she said, "I've been learning a lot, and learning the most important thing, which is to respect all people's beliefs. It's kind of like I've learned how you respect every actor's process, even if you don't agree with it, and you think they're insane if they're banging their head against the wall and yelling out obscenities. If that's what they need to do, that's what they need to do. I feel the same way about religion. Even if you don't get it, you have to respect it. So working on this film started out just wanting to work with Janusz, and it ended up also being a great experience, and learning a lot about respect and faith." □

HOLLOW MAN

Invisibility effects taken to a new level by Sony Imageworks.

By Chuck Wagner

Academy Award winning (for his work on *BABE*) visual effects supervisor Scott E. Anderson brought his skill to the problem of making Kevin Bacon, star of Paul Verhoeven's *THE HOLLOW MAN*, vanish one layer at a time for the Sony Pictures drama, which opened in theatres nationwide August 4.

"We really believed it was very important to have the actor in the scene," Anderson said, "even though we would be making him essentially invisible. We called that either performance reference or just 'Kevin removal.' We did it multiple ways. In some cases, we were able to just use traditional motion control, and then remove the background by green screen pulls. We worked with the green screen fabric and special green screen makeup.

"Essentially, motion control hasn't changed in a long time. What we used is something we called a self dolly, a very portable and location-friendly motion control dolly which allows us to operate the camera, generate a move based on Kevin's performance, and then go back and do clean versions of the background without him present, which gives us the nat-



In the grip of the invisible man, Greg Grunberg as cardiologist Carter Abbey, hoisted by on-set physical effects supervised by Stan Parks.

ural background for the walls and rigid objects. What's tricky is when he touches the bed or something that moves. That has to be synthetically generated, and that's a much more delicate and painstaking process."

A far cry from Claude Rains and the original *INVISIBLE MAN*, filmed brilliantly by James Whale in 1932.

"Also they had the equivalent of removing the invisible guy. In black-and-white, you used a black makeup or fabric

to pull the person out and just burn in the new background. As it got to color, you got to blue screen technology and now we've made use of both blue screen, green screen, and black screen technology, depending on the scene. So Kevin wasn't only green. He was many colors.

"Some of the other methods we use for Kevin-removal are very modern in that we recreate backgrounds using computer models, simulations of cloth and fabric, rebuilding parts of the set and props digitally. But we also use a proprietary technique... We describe it as a rough, clean plate with an ability to work out, through a combination of photographic and digital techniques, a clean plate for a background that didn't originally have one. That's been a very powerful and flexible tool for us."

Did these tools exist at the start of the filming? "From the beginning we foresaw the project as very difficult, requiring an amazing amount of custom technology, given some of the problems that we thought of, and many that Paul thought of. For instance, it's very hard to do traditional cutting with an invisible man. It's hard to shoot a shot, and then shoot a reverse shot, when no one's there. So if



Sony opened Paul Verhoeven's paean to H. G. Wells nationwide August 4.

you look at the film, it's very fluid camera motion. The camera's travelling constantly, moving constantly, going from one actor to another, including the invisible Kevin."

Anderson also did effects work on *STARSHIP TROOPERS*. Did *HOLLOW MAN* require more camera movement? "Much more camera motion than they had. We instantly knew we had to develop tracking and background replacement techniques to allow Paul to do what he wanted. We weren't sure what the limits would be, but I think we managed to use motion control where we could do it, and not have it affect the look of the film. And then use these other techniques where we really had to push the envelope."

How about the old lockdown camera shot? "I think we

Bacon dons a latex mask to make himself a visible but "hollow man."





Kevin Bacon as **HOLLOW MAN** Sebastian Caine with Elisabeth Shue as research associate Linda McKay, effects supervised by Scott E. Anderson.

had one or two lock-offs in the film," Anderson said. "Paul doesn't really do lock-offs, and he doesn't do many inserts."

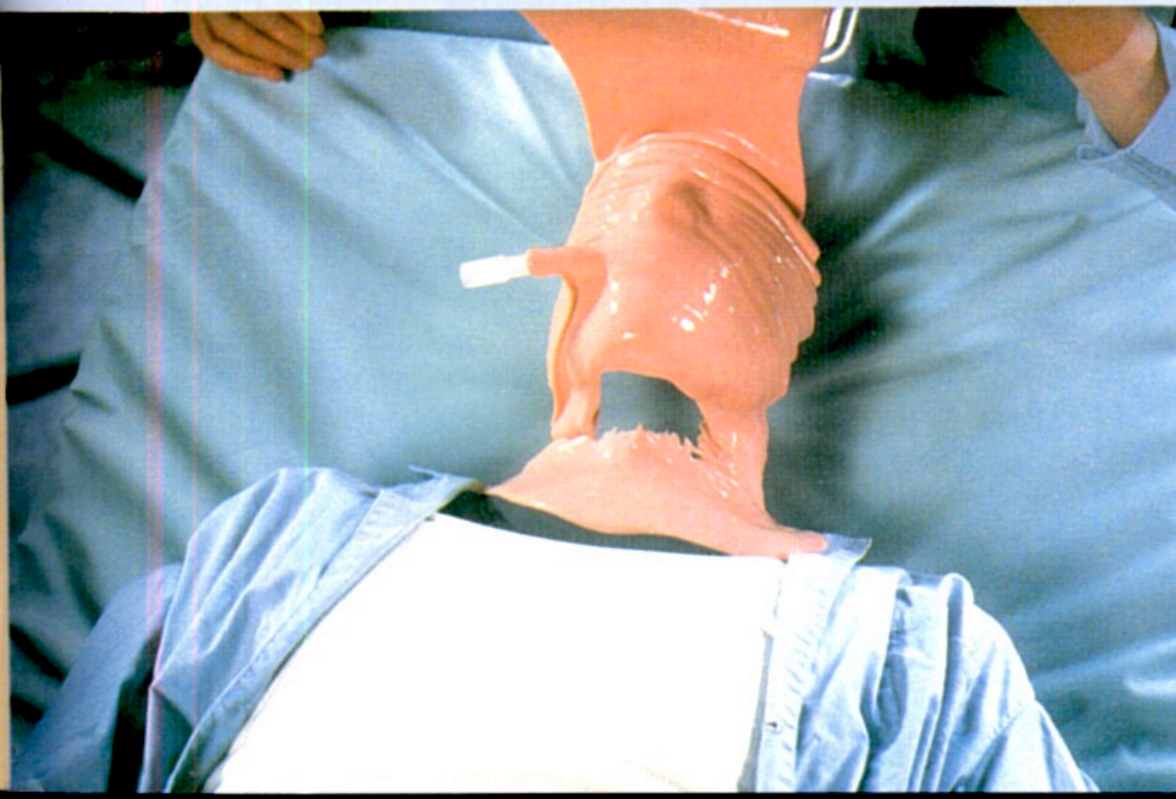
And the effect this has on cost? "Cost is always an object, but I like to think that our main responsibility is to the creative integrity of the film. We're here to help the filmmaker make the film he wants to make."

The effects include not just replacing Kevin Bacon with empty space, but the steps in Kevin's physique becoming invisible. "This movie's pretty different in that the invisibility process is chemically induced via an injection. So as the chemical passes through the body, it comes to one object after another, sort of in order. Each one of those progressively becomes more invisible. So we do have, literally, the flesh being peeled off a human body

layer by layer. That is, as amazingly as possible, Kevin's performance, and we just strip away his skin and go all the way down to nothingness."

This required accurate scans of Bacon's body. A stunt double was only rarely used. "We're building Kevin to within near-millimeter tolerances. It's from the outer skin to the inner muscles, and then making the skeleton and the organs all fit. So, it really was cost-prohibitive to build another whole version for a stunt person. Where we could or where we had to, we went with the stunt person, but the majority of the work—90-some-odd percent—was Kevin. I think, even though he's transitioning, we're still exactly feeding off his performance. We're staring at his face, we're staring at his body, and so we felt it was very important that it be

Sony Imageworks used black, blue and green costumes to remove Bacon, with the latex mask concept to modify the Invisible Man's traditional bandaged look.



SCOTT E. ANDERSON

"Kevin brings a whole level of richness to the film that we didn't want to avoid. We really wanted to embrace his performance and make it consistent through our work."

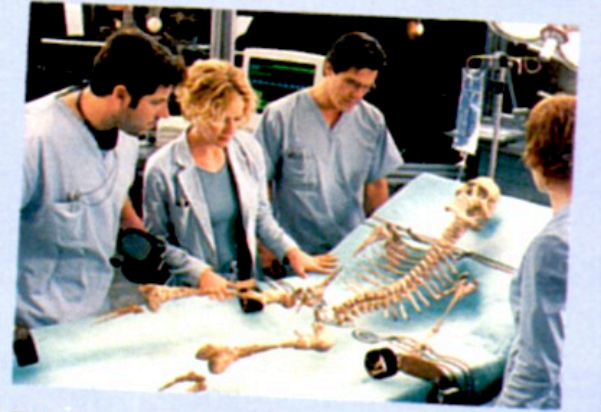
Kevin's performance, not somebody else's that we're trying to make look like Kevin. Kevin brings a whole level of richness to the film that we didn't want to avoid. We really wanted to embrace his performance and make it consistent through our work."

Besides making a man invisible bit by bit, layer by layer, what else did Anderson's work involve? "The question becomes, if you're looking for an invisible man, and he's invisible, how do you see him?" Anderson said. "You see him in other materials. You can see him in smoke, you can see him in fire, you see him in blood, you see him in rain, you see him in water...There's lots of different ways to expose an invisible man."

Bacon's character may be invisible when he jumps in a pool, but air bubbles will cling to him, outlining his form. "The pool sequence," Anderson said, "is one of the sequences that Phil Tippett's tackling, but I think, like everything else, we're all consistent in trying to use what's best out of the real world, and then accent it and build upon it with digital technology. In what I'm doing, it's always partially real, and partially digital. There's almost not a shot of our work that's clearly one way or the other. It's a shell game. We're always moving the target around so that the audience doesn't quite know where to look for the trick."

There are lab animals in the film, and some of them become invisible... "We did build a digital gorilla," Anderson explained, "that worked in conjunction with ADI's puppet suit gorilla. We have similar detail with the gorilla that we do with Kevin, so we have in-

Scans of Bacon's body were used for the sequence in which his invisibility serum makes his body disappear layer by layer and bone by bone.

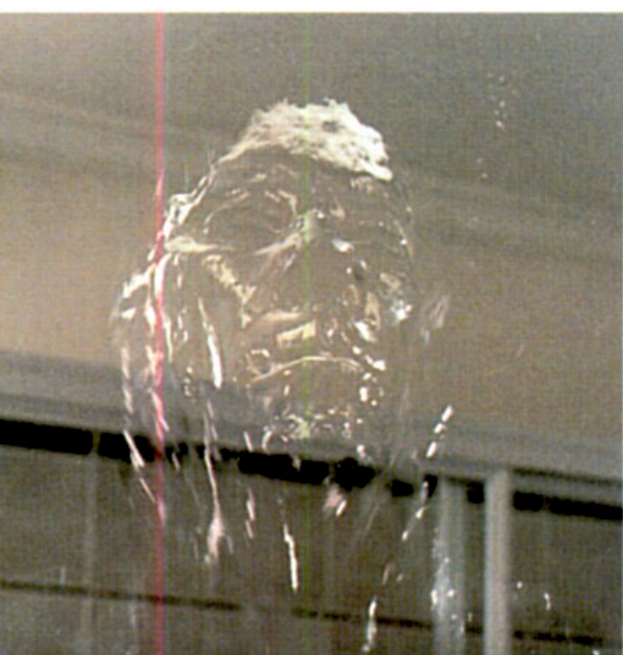


SCOTT E. ANDERSON

“We joke that each of my artists and technicians deserves an honorary medical degree. We built, I’d say, the most accurate representation of a working human body that’s been created.”

ternal gorilla organs and muscles and bones, because in the movie, before doing the invisibility procedure on a human, they test it on animals. We do get to see that process take place.”

And the other animals...? “The invisible animals are primarily seen through ‘thermal vision,’” Anderson said. “Thermal is a technique that we’ve worked out. We actually got a real thermal camera from Raytheon and modified it for motion picture use. So on set we’re using a video signal that the camera provides, and that gave the heat signature. And then we’re removing the animal



from the scene. You’re just seeing its heat signature. And then we also managed to acquire the data from the camera and convert it and process it and bring it out through film. If you counted all the monitors, it’d be hundreds and hundreds of monitors showing thermal animals. But the actors also use these thermal goggles, and the thermal goggle imagery is digitally-processed and output to film in order to show what they’d be seeing with their goggles.”

Rendering the human body from the inside must’ve been difficult. “We like to joke that each of my artists and technicians deserves an honorary medical degree off this project! Late in 1998 and early in 1999, we actually went as far as taking about 30 people to the Claremont Colleges and going to a human dissection. We had two physiologists consult with us throughout the early development of the human skeleton and the human physiology and body. We built,



Anatomy consultants helped create an accurate picture of Bacon’s physiology as he disappears. Below and Left: Water and smoke enhanced the effects.



I would say, the most accurate digital representation of a working human body that’s been created. Beth Riga and Stuart Simida worked with us for many, many months. After we built the working spine, and Beth and Stuart saw it working, they said, ‘We’ve always heard about this, but we’ve never actually seen it work.’ Because you can look at it in X-ray form, you can study a cadaver, but to see the muscles stripped away from the bone and the bone doing what it’s supposed to was pretty exciting for them, and pretty exciting for us.”

And the process was physi-

cally difficult for Kevin Bacon. “Needless to say, we didn’t think Kevin would be volunteering to have his flesh stripped any time soon to serve as an anatomical model. I think painting him green was the limit!”

When Bacon’s invisible character needs to interact, he wears a mask. And since he is invisible inside the close-fitting mask, the eyeholes are empty (hence the film’s title *THE HOLLOW MAN*).

“Bacon wore green, blue or black contacts and paint around the eyes, where appropriate,” Anderson said. “But the mask was an idea that came to us ear-

ly on after we first read the script. We didn’t want the bandages that the classic movie had. We didn’t want the face makeup that some TV projects have used. *MEMOIRS OF AN INVISIBLE MAN*, which I worked on, used the whole paint-on-the-make-up-and-see-the-face idea. So we were looking for something different. I was thinking along the lines of...when you pour Elmer’s glue on your skin as a kid, and you peeled it off, you got that sort of translucency feel. We ended up coming down to this latex mask that gets poured on him and forms his fake skin. It is a very signature look of the film, to have this person literally and figuratively be the ‘hollow man.’”

According to Anderson, the mask also functions to cut down on the light which inundates his eyes from all angles. Bacon’s character also wears sunglasses to cut down on this light, which does strike his retinas, even though they are invisible.

“There’s an amazing amount of physical effects, as well,” Anderson said. “Everything from physical models to full-scale practical effects.”

Is *THE HOLLOW MAN* more work than *STARSHIP TROOPERS* was? “We counted the set-ups,” Anderson said, “and about half the set-ups in the film are visual effects shots. By the time you count all the thermal shots—which we almost don’t count as shots anymore, they’re so relatively easy—to the hardest of the human body shots, you’re probably talking somewhere on the order of 600 shots. All is not said and done yet, and this movie is definitely the hardest thing I’ve ever worked on. It’s the first script I’ve read since I worked on *TERMINATOR 2*, where I read it and said, ‘I know this can be done, but how we’re going to do it, I don’t quite know.’ I like to say, on *THE HOLLOW MAN*, that the last year and a half has been prep for the next five months of getting this film out. It’s been an amazing technological and artistic development process to build, capture, and then express the human body on screen.” □

HOLLOW MAN

KEVIN BACON

The actor on the arduous task of not showing up.

By Chuck Wagner

Kevin Bacon noted that his star turn as Paul Verhoeven's Invisible Man—besides being the challenge of his acting career—was also strongly affecting emotionally. "I had a green face, a green hood which covers my whole head, green contacts that cover my entire eye—or black or blue, depending on what we're doing; they cover the white of the eye, too; and green teeth—it was oddly isolating. I'm someone who likes to act out and have a good time working. Have a few laughs. Every time they would see me without it—usually I'm there early in the morning and I use a different makeup trailer, the effects makeup trailer—I wouldn't even cross paths with them until I come on the set, they would die! So I felt odd and isolated, especially behind the latex mask. As soon as I would be out of it everyone would say, 'Ohhhh, nice to see you!' Like we were meeting again!"

But Bacon acknowledged that the strangeness of his appearance—and his fellow performers reaction to it—add to the effect the film is trying to achieve.

But would he have taken the role if he'd known what lay ahead? "I would definitely have taken it. I don't have any regrets about having done it. I try to live my life as regret free as possible. I took it because it's a great part in a big-ass movie! And I wanted to work with Paul [Verhoeven]. When you have a big sci-fi extravaganza, often the character's don't have much to say. You're one of the guys. The thing is the, whatever, the fear, or the monster, or the moon. I don't know if you could call HOLLOW MAN a character piece, but it's definitely got character in it. I like the transformation of the guy. When I met Paul, all I wanted to talk about was character, and all he wanted to talk about was if I could stand it. I don't think he had any questions about whether or not we were on the same page, or my ability to play the guy, or if I was going to be willing to go to the dark side—"

Bacon pointed to his black-face makeup. "—at least darker shit than this!" he added with a laugh. "He just wanted to know if I could stand it! But no, I don't have any regrets."

One sequence where a desperate colleague throws blood on his "invisible" form



The visible man: Bacon as brilliant but arrogant research scientist Sebastian Caine, corrupted by invisibility's power, a challenging but emotionally draining acting experience.

to make it visible was especially galling. Not only was there the optical effect makeup, but then the blood splatters, so that if the shot had to be done again—"...and again, and again!" Bacon said, recalling the need to clean up and get re-made up for every attempt. "Those were my worst days on the picture. But I don't know what the alternative is. You have to get the shot some time. Or you quit the picture."

A hiatus of a couple of months had to be taken during filming when co-star Elizabeth Shue ruptured her Achilles tendon while exercising. Bacon said the hiatus affected him more personally than professionally. Married to actress Kyra Sedgewick and with a family, and also a performer in the Bacon Brothers band, the time-off meant a longer separation from his East-Coast-based family and impacted his band schedule.

Though filming began in the Fall of 1999, earlier this year Bacon was still on the Sony lot in California, completing what

he believed to be his final day of shooting. The role Bacon plays doesn't just demand physical hardship to portray becoming invisible; it also conveys his psychological transformation of what invisibility does to him—what latent desires the invisibility triggers.

"We're a group of young, yet brilliant scientists," Bacon quipped, tongue a bit in cheek. "We've got a secret project funded by the Pentagon to experiment with invisibility. In an abandoned bunker we've built this lab. We started on small animals, and by the beginning of the movie we're up to primates, gorillas. We've made a gorilla invisible, but we haven't figured out how to get it back yet from invisibility, we've got a lot of invisible animals running around, and then we figure it out."

And Bacon's character has dark plans for the technology. "He lies a lot," Bacon said of his character. "I don't think Paul has a hidden agenda with this character. I think Paul's got ideas about the nature of power and the seduction of power, and what it can do to you. I call the movie THE HORNY MAN sometimes! There's a very strong sexual element to it. My character relates to all the women in the movie in a very, very, consciously sexual way. The relationship between myself and Elizabeth's character is that we were once together and now we're not anymore. But there's a lot of sexual cat-and-mouse that's going on all the time. And voyeurism is a very important element."

What else would a naughty invisible male do, but peep at women! "To me, if you're going to do a movie about invisibility," Bacon said, "you're going to make it dark. Voyeurism is the first thing I thought of when I was a kid, I mean if I was going to be invisible—"

Sneak into the girl's locker room? "Definitely. Walk right in!" he said with a laugh.

Any other optical effects, other than Bacon-removal? "Not too much really. The interesting thing about this movie in green screen is something you hear about all the time. But aside from the elevator shaft in the movie, we have almost no green screen. I mean, I am the green screen!"

Bacon finds Verhoeven's intensity appropriate to the movie and would work with him again without hesitation. "I play a mad scientist in the movie, and that's kind of what he is!" he said. □

THE WATCHER

FBI agent James Spader, stalked by a serial

By Dan Scapperotti

Several years ago, music video director Joe Charbanic had an idea for a low budget film about a cat and mouse game between an FBI agent and a serial killer. He and Dorothy Myers worked up the script for *MACON*, and took it to producer Christopher Eberts. On the second presentation, the property was snapped up by Interlight Pictures, but time and circumstances were to remold the story into a high concept action picture, *THE WATCHER*. Universal Pictures opens the serial killer saga nationwide September 22.

Charbanic is a California native who was raised in the movie industry. Although his mother was a studio executive, Charbanic had no particular ambition to enter the business. That is, until he took an intern position in the publicity department of Columbia Pictures. He entered the music video industry as a runner and over the next ten years, worked his way up through the ranks to First AD, production manager and finally producer. He stepped into the director's chair with *Three Eleven's* "Do You Right."

"I started directing them and realized that the directors I had been working for all these years who were causing me problems were idiots," said Charbanic. His credits include videos for "When Doves Cry" with Prince and George Michael's "Father Figure," as well as some videos for Keanu Reeves' band, Dog Star.

"Our script was very rough, very artsy and very crude," admitted Charbanic, "so they brought in some writers to polish it and make it a little more Hollywood than we originally intended. Our original concept was more down and dirty. The writers that they brought in

"When I saw the first episode of THE SOPRANOS I went, 'Oh fuck!' said Charbanic. "Just like when I saw THE BONE COLLECTOR. I swear I came up with those ideas."



Spader as FBI agent Joel Campbell, an L.A. burn-out on serial killer detail who moves to Chicago only to be followed by his prey, played by Keanu Reeves.

made it a more action-thriller kind of thing, which was fine. It still kept a lot of the integrity of the original script."

FBI agent Joel Campbell has spent years chasing Griffin, a Los Angeles serial killer, played by Keanu Reeves. Griffin will photograph the girl he is going to kill next and send the photograph to the FBI. It then becomes a race against time to find the target before she is murdered, with the photograph as their only clue. When someone very close to Campbell is killed, the agent snaps. Burned out from the relentless cat and mouse game Griffin has devised, Campbell takes an early retirement and starts a new life in Chicago, far from the stomping grounds of his nemesis. Unfortunately, not far enough.

Griffin isn't finished with Campbell yet. A new agent is assigned to the case, but he doesn't offer Griffin the challenge he demands so he follows Campbell to the Windy City, where a new rash of murders begin. "He wants to get Campbell back in the ballgame because he's bored," said Charbanic. "All serial killers want to be caught. That's why they leave clues. That's why they have names. They're like rock stars. His fame started going down because they changed FBI agents, so he wants to get the game going again."

Intrigued by serial killers and a self-admitted "documentary freak," one of the things Charbanic demanded was that the film be as authentic as possible within the confines of the

dramatic situations. "It's not that we were going with any kind of trend," said the director on the rash of serial killer films, "it was just that it was something I was really into at the time. The one great thing is that when we got to actual production I was lucky enough to be able to consult FBI profilers. If you see bigger budget films like *THE NEGOTIATOR* you don't see the FBI logo; you don't even see the Chicago Police logos. I wanted to be very authentic, so we went to the FBI and the Chicago Police Department and got their permission. It's a very accurate film. We actually had FBI agents on the set when we were filming, as well as the Chicago Police Department. We had really great consultation. I'm really into accuracy on that kind of stuff."

While doing his research and questioning various agents, Charbanic was shocked to learn that there were at least four known serial killers operating in Chicago, and about 12 within a 100 square mile area. "I had no idea," he said. "So I used that in the film. There's a scene where James Spader and Keanu confront each other and he mentions that."

James Spader was cast as the harried agent Campbell, who must contend with a vicious killer while his own life is unraveling. In the original screenplay, Campbell was confined to a wheelchair, but *THE BONE COLLECTOR* was released, and the agent was suddenly back on his feet. "I think he's a great actor," said Charbanic of Spader. "The character was a mix between a drug addict and a very anal, precise FBI type. One thing I've learned about the FBI is that they have a high suicide rate and they have a high medical problem rate because of stress. As an actor, James Spader did an incredible job. He

HER

killer, Keanu Reeves?

could play a drug addict or an FBI agent and he kind of had to play both.”

Charbanic had a history with Keanu Reeves from his days in the music video biz and the actor was his one and only choice for the part of the psychotic Griffin. “I’m really into mis-casting,” he said. “Keanu has always played the good guy. This is the first film where he’s ever played a bad guy. The first film where he’s ever killed good people not bad people. And the first time he’s ever played a serial killer. Everything pointed to not having him do it and he was perfect. It’s almost Ted Bundy-ish. He’s charismatic and attractive. You can see why girls would get in his car. You can see why people would be fooled by him. But then, when he gets mean, he’s as mean as mean gets. He just blew me away.”

Campbell’s encounters with Griffin have left him with some psychological wounds. Having retired on a reduced pension, the ex-agent can’t afford an expensive professional so he seeks treatment from a young psychiatrist who is just starting out, played by Academy Award winner Marisa Tomei. “Her part is not huge,” said Charbanic, “and

Rock video stylist Joe Charbanic makes his feature directing debut, likening serial killers to rock stars.



she’s not raving and ranting or doing things she has been known for in the past. It’s a very subtle part, but she was such a class act. Her character is sort of an up and comer. Her office is sort of dilapidated and she doesn’t dress totally great. She’s a beautiful woman, but we make her a little more normal than maybe people are used to with her. She’s just trying to earn her stripes. Campbell is her most incredible client because he talks about things that she’s only read about in books.”

The idea of a female psychiatrist treating a man whose world is filled with violence brings to mind THE SOPRANOS. “We started this movie two years ago,” said Charbanic. “When I saw the first episode of THE SOPRANOS I went, ‘Oh Fuck.’ It was like when I saw THE BONE COLLECTOR! I swear to you, I came up with those two ideas before either of those things ever came out and we adjusted them because of those shows.” Like the sexual tension between Tony Soprano and Dr. Melfi on the HBO series, Charbanic keeps any romantic inclinations unfulfilled.

When shooting began, Charbanic found himself the new kid on the block about to helm his first feature film. “The great thing that I had going for me was that I had ten years of production experience. I’ve worked with every band you could imagine. So I’ve seen and heard it all. I know the equipment, I know the crew. I know what all their jobs are and a lot of directors don’t know that. So the crew was immediately on my side.”

His biggest challenge, however, was dealing with the multiple personalities on the set. “In music videos you have usually one to five band members and one client,” said Charbanic. “In



Spader is caught in a cat and mouse game with Reeves, cast against type. Universal Pictures opens their action packed serial killer saga September 22.

film, you have ten actors and 200 crew people. You get an Academy Award-winning actress and you have two other major actors on the set at the same time. It’s a little tricky. My cameraman, Michael Chapman, was one of the best in the world. He did RAGING BULL, TAXI DRIVER, and THE FUGITIVE. He is old school big-time, the best, and he was amazing; I didn’t have a track record. Everyone else on the set had a track record so that was probably the most difficult. Growing up in L.A. some of my best friends are major actors so fame doesn’t mean anything to me, and they knew that. I knew when to get mad and I knew when not to worry about it.”

THE WATCHER boasts plenty of action. “It’s a thriller,” Charbanic insisted, “not a love story or blood-and-guts story. There are some incredible car chases, there are some great foot chases and exciting scenes of Keanu stalking his victims. It’s scary and it’s creepy, but there are no chainsaws.”

Charbanic got excited when recalling how he blew up Chicago. “Near the end of the film there is this huge car chase,” he said. “We used to call it the RONIN car chase. It races through Chicago with the police chasing Keanu’s character. We blew the shit out of the city. We knocked the windows out of peoples homes while they were eating dinner, we ruined cars by accident.

We had a lot of making up to do.”

After researching over 50 serial killer profiles, Charbanic created Griffin as a composite of those killers. The director compares his film to a roller coaster ride with intense peaks and investigative valleys before the next peak. “It was a fun idea and taken to levels that I didn’t anticipate because I thought I was going to do a much smaller film,” he said. “It’s very accurate on serial killers. Keanu is a charismatic, good-looking guy, but when he’s scary he’s not really attractive, he’s monstrous. He looks like a monster. He turns on the evil side really incredibly.” Monstrous or not, because of Reeves’ performance, Charbanic found himself at screenings hoping Griffin would get away. “Even when he’s killing people, you sort of root for him,” he said. “I always love rooting for the bad guy.”

The cult of celebrity is what drives most serial killers who manage to develop their own fan base. “This is more about fame than being a serial killer,” Charbanic discovered in his research with FBI agents. “Serial killers are like someone who wants to play a guitar to be famous. It’s just another avenue to be famous. People want to be famous. Ninety percent of serial killers are hyper-intelligent. The character of Griffin is a hyper-intelligent guy that really just feeds off the fame.” □

By Thomas Doherty

"Evolution leaps forward," intones Professor X (Patrick Stewart) amid a title sequence swirling with double helixes and genetic codes. As things later evolve, he is right on the money. After decades of stunted gestation, a Marvel Comic has finally come to the screen with the wit, wonder, and energy of the page-turning original. X-MEN not only survives the new environment but thrives as a fit species of biotech-flavored SF and, doubtless, the virile progenitor of a race of profitable sequels.

Conceived in an age in which gene splicing and genome mapping were not even fantasies, X-MEN seemed all too credible and topical in summer 2000: two rival bands of mutant humans, genetically altered by either natural evolution or medical intervention, do battle for supremacy at the top of the food chain, spicing up the human gene pool with supernatural appendages and mind over matter abilities.

About time, too. It is remarkable that the wondrous universe spun by the prolific Stan Lee at Marvel Comics in the mid-1960s has never before come to cinematic life with the galvanizing excitement engendered by the classic comic books. For a generation of youngsters on the cusp of puberty, Lee's off-kilter sensibility and seductive off-world mythos offered a magical deliverance from the pallid panels of Disney and DC. Back before Lee and his crew of gifted illustrators reinvigorated the moribund format, Superman, Batman, and the Justice League of America—whitebread stiffs all—strutted through plotlines as bland as the pen and ink illustrations that chronicled their exploits. (Remember this was after the Comics Code Authority had put the quietus on the juvenile delinquency-inducing gore of EC Comics and before Frank Miller had given Batman a facelift in *The Dark Knight*—and well before the term "graphic novel" was coined.)

Realizing that he really wasn't going to write the great American novel, that comics were hack work only if hacks worked on them, Lee decided to bring some of the pleasures of art and literature to the lowbrow genre: introspective: complex characters, intricate (sometimes ludicrously intricate) plotting, and lush, phantasmagorical artwork, usually from the quirky quills of Jack Kirby or Steve Ditko. For Lee's heroes, the supernatural prowess bestowed by a radioactive spider or lab experiment gone bad were as much psychic burdens as physical gifts. A talent for web-crawling didn't make getting a prom date any easier. Soon, the Marvel and DC rivalry was as overmatched as the Beatles and the Dave Clark Five.

Yet in the decades that followed, even as Su-

X-MEN

MARVEL COMICS MASTERPIECE

At last, a movie with all the wit, wonder and energy of the original.



Hugh Jackman as Wolverine, in a star-making debut and Rebecca-Romijn-Stamos as Mystique, fulsomely showcasing her Marvel-ous proportions.

perman and Batman spawned lucrative motion picture franchises, Marvel Comics' efforts at cross media synergy were more miss than hit: the likeable TV series *THE INCREDIBLE HULK*, the rather dull *BLADE* (1998), and a limp cartoon version of *SPIDER-MAN*.

X-MEN, however, is exquisite. Under the expert helming of Bryan Singer, director of the overrated *USUAL SUSPECTS* and the underrated *APT PUPIL*, the film retains that seductive mesh of loopy fantasy and faux realism that defines the comic book milieu—where the earth as we know it looks familiar enough but certain people just happen to defy the laws of physics and biology.

For X-MEN experts, the backstory is familiar enough, but the striking opening will surprise even the cognoscenti. Set in Poland in 1944, the sequence evokes the *mise en scene* of *SCHINDLER'S LIST* more than the panels of Marvel Comics: a tormented parade of yellow-starred Jews and tattooed camp workers is forced-marched into a Nazi death camp. A young Jewish boy witnesses his family pass through the gates, a trauma that leaves him, a protean mutant, with an abiding hatred of all mankind.

The X-MEN line-up is so vibrantly sketched

that even a Marvel Comics virgin will be able to keep up. Not that the characters exactly blend into the furniture (well, one of them can). The alpha male among the X-MEN is the hunky Wolverine (Hugh Jackman, in a star-making performance), defined by his stainless steel claws, recuperative powers, and surly manner. A reluctant recruit to the ranks of X-dom, we know within his lupine heart beats a sentimental puppy because of his big brotherly bond with the troubled teen mutant Rogue (Anna Paquin).

Lending the film a subtext of seriousness, or pretentiousness is the Xenophobic raving of the McCarthyite Senator Kelly (Bruce Davidson), who seeks to pass a proposed Mutant Registration Act, a kind of Nuremberg Law targeting the chromosomically challenged. The political allegory is somewhat dreary and overwrought; the film noticeably picks up steam when the senator is liquidated from the proceedings. As Rogue knows, the X-men subtext is less about political oppression than sexual awakening: the mutations, Dr. Jane Gray explains meaningfully, first manifest themselves at puberty.

X-MEN keeps intact the wicked witticisms and howling hyperbole of the comic books: the knowing irony (the Hitchcockian finale atop the Statue of Liberty), the outlandish attire ("you actually go out in this things?" says Wolverine when he spies the official X-men uniform), and the cornball comic balloon dialogue ("you homo sapiens and your guns!" sneers Magneto). For the boys, the Marvel-ous proportions of the X-babes are fulsomely showcased, especially Stamos, spray-painted into an spangled blue outfit, a Jack Kirby pin-up come to life.

Of course, X-MEN suffers from the usual problem with comic book characters: they never die. But such quibbles are extraneous. A summer movie that is fun but not moronic, fantastic in vision but grounded in real emotions, vivid characters, and timely issues, the comic book-derived X-MEN is smarter than *MI-2* and more believable than *GONE IN 60 SECONDS*. It is true to its comic book mentality, which in the case of Stan Lee and Marvel Comics is high praise. □

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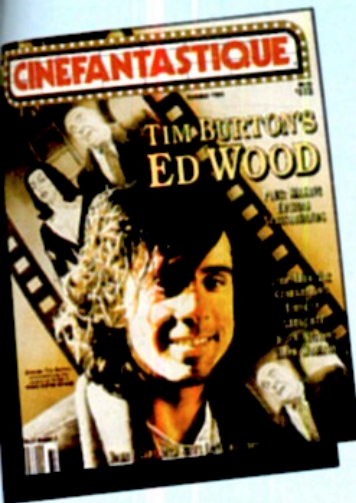
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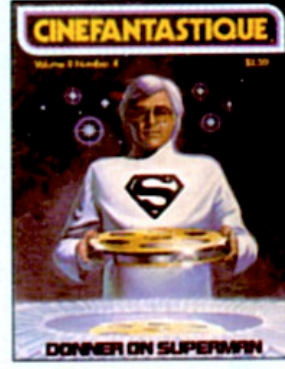
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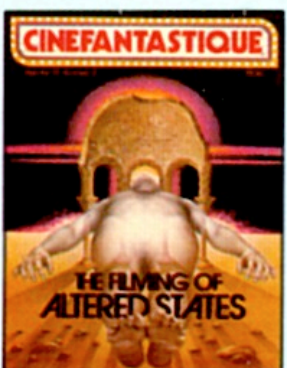
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